

February 20, 2015

[Original]

Hiring

Mr. Fitch: It is a privilege to rise in opposition and ask the Premier a couple of questions. Hopefully, we will get some answers today. I know that my colleague has told him what it is about, so he probably has some scripted answers for me. However, again, I want to get to the basics of the process involved in the hiring of the three deputy ministers for the Jobs Board that was announced the other day. I am surprised that the Premier went on the attack and became very defensive, so maybe I have touched a nerve.

We know that Robertson Surette advertised for one position—the position of secretary—and we ended up with a chief economist, a chief of business relationships, and a chief executive officer. I am wondering whether the Premier could clarify how that process worked. Was Robertson Surette running a three-for-one deal that day? Were these competitions not open and just appointed by the Premier? These are questions that I think the people of...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question; it is the same one he repeated several times yesterday, so, of course, the answer will not change.

An independent process, led by Knightsbridge Robertson Surette, was put in place, and I am very proud of it for several reasons. The first reason is that the process is independent. The second one is that it enabled us to hire four people who will help us create jobs and grow the economy.

These four people have so much experience and know-how that it makes me very proud of the independent process that was put in place and of the people it enabled us to discover. It is inspiring to see people like Susan Holt, David Campbell, Jacques Pinet, and Stephen Lund accept a pay cut by leaving the private sector to come and help us, and we are very proud to have them among us.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: Once again, I am not questioning the capabilities of these individuals. I know two of the four that the Premier mentioned in answer to the last question. The question that I am asking again is based on what the government said about noncompetitive hiring and how it would do things differently. I am making sure that the government's actions line up with its



words. We are using the same yardstick that the Premier used when he was in opposition, and that is the yardstick that we will use when we question him as well.

We want to know—and it is very, very factual: Were the hirings done by open competition, or were they appointments made out of the Premier’s Office? It has been said in many of the mandate letters that have gone out that all hirings and firings will be done through the Premier’s Office. This is a reasonable question. It is not an attack on the capabilities of the individuals involved. It is just a question of the process. How was it done? Were these four positions open competitions, or were they appointments by the Premier?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will once again answer the question put to me: I did not choose the people who were hired; they were selected through an independent process led by Knightsbridge Robertson Surrette. I think this is the fifth time I have answered the same question. It is an independent process which has obviously worked very well, since we have hired four extraordinary people who have great experience in job creation and economic growth.

I am very proud, and I think we, the government and the people of New Brunswick, are fortunate to have four people who have such a passion for their province that they are willing to accept a pay cut to help us try to grow our economy and create jobs.

Once again, the hiring was done independently; this way of doing things obviously worked, since the four people selected will help us, I am sure of it. I am very proud to have them on our team.

[*Original*]

Mr. Fitch: Once again, I am just asking the Premier about the process. He engaged Robertson Surrette to advertise for one position, the position of secretary. He ended up with three. All I want to know is this: Did Robertson Surrette not have the mandate to hire one or to come back with one name? Was it given the mandate to come back with three and to fill these three positions?

It is plain and simple, yet, for some reason, the Premier continues to avoid the question. I just want to know this: Were the contract and the direction to Robertson Surrette to hire one person or to hire three people?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again—for the sixth time, I believe—it was an independent process. Knightsbridge Robertson Surrette undertook this process, and it came forward with the four names. The four names went through Knightsbridge Robertson Surrette. I do not even know who applied, and I do not know how many people applied. I was told that there were many candidates interviewed who were very strong but that we had found the four people who will best help us create jobs and grow the economy.



Since I have answered that again, I will move on to another subject. It is very interesting to see the members opposite talk about there being 26 jobs created by our government. Maybe we are not as interested in making big communications splashes for the jobs that have been created. However, because of what we are doing and because of the entrepreneurial spirit of New Brunswickers, the economy, since we were sworn in, has produced 2 600 jobs. We are very proud of our record, and we are going to continue the momentum.

Mr. Fitch: We can conclude from the Premier's remarks that Robertson Surette is now doing the hiring out of the Premier's Office. Again, when he said they had advertised for one position, Robertson Surette came back with three names... Apparently, the Jobs Board and the economic development policy of the government are now being run by Robertson Surette. According to the remarks of the Premier, it sounds as if the company came back with three names and said: We cannot decide. You should hire all four.

Will the Premier confirm that he is not running the government anymore, when it comes to hiring for the Jobs Board, but that Robertson Surette is?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think the opposition members should have a bit of a caucus meeting to decide what their strategy is. Do they want to say that I am controlling everything or that others are controlling things? They should first decide on the narrative that they are trying to pretend is the case. It is a bit chaotic to listen to the opposition this morning.

With that said, Knightsbridge Robertson Surette had an independent process and came forward with four names. The four names went through this independent process. I have to ask the Leader of the Opposition: Is he questioning the competence of the four individuals who have joined us and who have taken a salary cut from the private sector to help us create jobs? Is he questioning the credibility of Knightsbridge Robertson Surette? It is one or the other.

I have explained what the process was, and I have explained the wonderful individuals who came out of that process. Does he believe that the individuals are not competent? Does he believe that this independent business is not credible? Which one is it?

Mr. Fitch: It is pretty obvious. There was a third choice there that the Premier decided not to put forward. I am questioning his competency. That is what I am doing. It is obvious that he does not know how to answer this question because he has avoided it many, many times. I am simply asking who is making the decisions here. We know that he wanted to do all the firing and hiring out of his office. We have seen that. We have seen evidence of that in many, many situations, from CEOs right down to directors and beyond.

Now, we are trying to get to the hirings. Why is he avoiding coming up with an answer that says, yes, he made the decision to hire these people—he appointed these people? Why is he so blatantly hiding behind this process when, again, they were asked for one person and three were hired? Who is running the Premier's Office now? Is the Premier letting Robertson Surette make all the decisions, or is he still in charge?



Mr. Speaker: Member for Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is quite funny, actually, because this is so foreign to the Leader of the Opposition to have a group do this work for us independently, to have a group independently go through a process of finding the best talent—people who are competent, people who merit the positions that we have offered. That is so foreign to them that they believe that those people are now running government. They believe that that is the only thing. They say: No, you have to make all the decisions. If you ask somebody to do anything independently, you are not running government anymore. This is so foreign to the opposition members that they do not even understand the process we went through.

We have four phenomenal individuals, four incredible people, who are going to do wonderful things. These four people have the know-how, the experience, the desire, and, I would say, the passion to help us create jobs in this province.

Mr. Fitch: I seem to have touched a nerve with the Premier here. Again, we are just looking for process. Maybe he does not understand the math. They advertised for one job and hired three people. We are trying to get to the bottom of this.

Mr. Speaker: Order, members.

Mr. Fitch: Why not get to know some of the people a little bit better? The Premier hired Susan Holt and David Campbell. I worked with them at various times, as stakeholders. Actually, David Campbell was hired by us to produce a report that the Premier has now adopted as his. He ripped out a few pages on shale gas, and he touts it as his own plan. It is much less diversified than when we were in government. Stephen Lund is a former Saint Johner and is known very well throughout the province. Again, he is a very capable person. The only person that I did not know was Jacques Pinet. I asked around our area if anybody knew him. Some people were saying: Yes, he likes the cottage, and he is also a fund-raiser for the Liberal Party. Can the Premier...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not sure there was a question there, but I will repeat what I have said. There was an independent process with Knightsbridge Robertson Surette. Knightsbridge Robertson Surette undertook this process and came up with four fantastic individuals. If the opposition members have a problem with the competency of those four individuals, that is certainly their prerogative. We certainly do not. We believe that these four individuals have the exact type of skill set that we are going to need to be able to create jobs, grow the economy, and create the conditions for businesses and entrepreneurs to help us do those things.

Again, I would like to say that we are very proud of what has been happening so far. There is still lots to do, but when the opposition members talk about 26 jobs being created by this government, they forget a couple of zeros. It is really 2 600 since we were sworn in. We are



going to continue to do that work with the phenomenal people who have raised their hands and said: We want to help. We want to be part of this initiative. We want to help create jobs and grow the economy. With their help, that is what we will do.

[*Translation*]

Hospitals

Ms. Dubé: Now that we know that the Minister of Social Development did not invest the \$7 million she had in her budget to help seniors stay in their homes longer and that the Minister of Health is touring the province and putting all options on the table, including closing certain small hospitals, I would like to give the Minister of Health the opportunity to tell us which hospitals they are. Is he talking about one, two, or three hospitals? I would like to hear the answer from the Minister of Health.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I have to confess that I did not hear the member's question. I thought it was directed to a colleague of mine, but I will gladly provide an answer to the question if she wants to ask it again.

Ms. Dubé: Only if the Speaker would allow me to ask a fourth question. I do not want to lose one.

[*Translation*]

My question was for the Minister of Health. Since he said that all options were on the table, including closing some small hospitals, I asked him a specific question about what stage he has reached in his tour. Is he now considering closing one, two, or three hospitals? I asked him to tell us specifically where he stands with his plan.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thank the member for the question, and I apologize for not hearing it the first time.

We are obviously still doing a consultation tour. We have concluded our five meetings with our stakeholders across the province, and we still have three public meetings to hold by Monday evening. Obviously, we are still very early on in the process.

We continue to move forward on the basis that all options are on the table. We have not made any decisions yet, since the Strategic Program Review process is one that will last several months, after all. We want people to have their say, so we want to consult with them. We want to look at all possible options in order to be able to address the financial situation in which our province currently finds itself.



Ms. Dubé: Once again, the minister is confirming to us that all options are on the table and that closing some small hospitals is probably in his sights. While the minister is doing his tour, members from various regions are meeting people to tell them not to worry, since there will not be any hospital closures. These members are trying to calm things down, yet all options are on the table, as the minister has repeated several times.

The minister does not want to tell us how many hospitals will be closed. We have also clearly heard the minister say that another option is to convert hospital beds into permanent nursing home beds for seniors. Can the minister tell us today approximately how many excess hospital beds he thinks there are and how many of them he is planning on converting for seniors?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: There is something I would like to clarify before I answer the question from the member opposite. She is only focusing on small hospitals, but the Strategic Program Review looks at all government and departments. This review will look at the overall Department of Health budget. Some savings may be found in small hospitals, just as some may be found in large hospitals or in the rest of the Department of Health budget. So, this is an exercise in which we look at all of government. We are facing a fiscal challenge, and we must find between \$500 million and \$600 million. We will do it by looking at each program and department; we will examine everything the government does.

With regard to the question, again, no decisions have been made. However, we certainly have a challenge in terms of seniors in hospital beds throughout the province.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, your replacement question.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: Here is my specific question for the Minister of Health. He is confirming to us that there are too many hospital beds, so, according to him, we need to start converting them for seniors. Once again, he has just said that we have a problem because there are too many seniors in hospital beds. The only option the government is considering at this time is the conversion and closure of hospital beds, if not the complete closure of hospitals.

My question is still for the same minister. Your government's plan includes saving the money you are trying to find throughout the province on the backs of seniors. Is your vision to keep seniors in hospital instead of finding other resources in the communities?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I want to be clear on a couple of things here. First of all, there have not been seniors in hospital beds only over the last four months. This is a situation that has existed in New Brunswick for years. It is a challenge for all New Brunswickers. We have seniors in



hospital beds who should possibly be in their own homes. They should be in the community. They should be in nursing homes. There is a challenge there that we need to address.

We are looking at every option. No decisions have been taken with regard to the Strategic Program Review. We are looking at all the options. We are looking at the same options that the members opposite were looking at when they were in government. I would invite the member to ask her colleague the former Minister of Health about this. He is quoted on the front page of the *Telegraph-Journal* as saying: Had we been reelected, we would have been looking at those things as well.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin, come to order.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: That is because we have a challenge here in the province that we need to deal with. We need to look at every available option. To date...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Crown Lands

Mr. Coon: The memorandum of agreement signed with J.D. Irving last year, February 7, guarantees in law a dramatic increase in the take of softwood from Crown lands for the next 25 years. This has enraged many New Brunswickers and First Nations communities that have never ceded the land to the Crown in the first place.

My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Given the mountain of Supreme Court decisions to guide him, the *Chilcotin* decision being the most recent, how can the minister allow the implementation of these memoranda of agreement when First Nations were never consulted about such major changes to the use of the forest lands the Crown holds in trust?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I am pleased to answer the question put to me, since I think that if the leader of the third party, the Green Party, is asking me this question, it is because he is not really aware of what happened.

The Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management in New Brunswick was not put in place by this government, but rather by the previous government. I think the member opposite should ask the members sitting beside him why they did not consult with Indigenous people and, judging by what he is telling us, ask them what was supposed to come of this.

What we said during our party's election campaign and as the new government was that we would review this strategy. That is what we are going to do, starting with a look at whether there are any gaps. We will try to find out what we can do to improve the strategy if improvements prove necessary.



[Original]

Mr. Coon: If the rules of the House allowed it, I might, from time to time, want to ask a question to the members beside me. The rules of the House do not allow that, so I will not.

The small businesses operated by thousands of private woodlot owners were shaken to their core when government flooded the wood yards of the big businesses with Crown wood that it redirected some years ago from mills that it closed up north. With the dramatic increase in softwood supply now guaranteed in law for these big businesses to ensure their competitiveness and their sustainability, the private woodlot owners' market could be ruined. What will the minister do to ensure that the competitiveness and sustainability of the forestry operations for the thousands of woodlot owners across our province are protected?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: As I indicated, we are reviewing the Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management in New Brunswick. I actually met certain marketing board officials a few weeks ago. I know that, over the next two weeks, I will probably meet again with the officials of five or six different marketing boards. We want to discuss problems affecting the marketing boards.

I will repeat what I said, which is that our government has not made a final decision on the Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management. I hope the member opposite can understand what I am saying to him, which is that, in the upcoming weeks, our government will certainly make some decisions. We will examine everything that was done in terms of consultations as well as things we will have learned from my consultations with the various groups. At that time, we will make a final decision.

[Original]

Mr. Coon: The memorandum of agreement signed with J.D. Irving locks in a broken forest management system for 25 years. Independent mills across New Brunswick struggle to secure the kind of wood they need in the volumes that they require from the big corporations. These corporations control their Crown wood allocation, giving licensees the power to determine when local people employed by those mills—the sublicensees—have jobs and when they do not. Will the minister overhaul the *Crown Lands and Forests Act* to end this lopsided, dysfunctional, and abusive relationship it has created between big corporate licensees and the independent sawmills holding sublicenses? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I remind the member opposite that we inherited this file when we took office.

The Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management came into being, so to speak, last March.



Here is the reminder I would give the Green Party Leader: According to our consultation, J.D. Irving is not the only one that will benefit from this forest management strategy. In fact, AV Nackawic and AV Cell, in Atholville, will also benefit from the strategy. In addition, it is worth mentioning that Indigenous people will get 5% of the 660 000 m³ of wood. Twin Rivers Paper Company and Chaleur Sawmills will also receive timber allocations. No one group will control the forest, since deals have been made with various businesses.

We indicated in our election platform that one of our priorities was to create jobs, and that is why we must examine this whole strategy and, hopefully, make decisions sooner rather than later. We have things to do, and, as a government, we are going to make decisions about this forest strategy.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Legislative Reform

Mr. B. Macdonald: We are beginning to see how things work with this government. Every day, you get another piece of the truth, and, every day, you get one step closer to good government. It is question period that is making that happen. It is an important function to question the government and, lately, to educate the Premier.

Last week, it took three question periods for the Minister of Health to tell us where he had reallocated the \$4 million for the Chalmers hospital. Two days ago, the Premier admitted he did not understand his own rule changes, and we had to educate him on that. Yesterday, the Premier showed us he does not even understand the current rules of the House, so we had to educate him on that. For example, it is the opposition that asks the questions in question period and the government provides the answers. There is also the fact that amendments are proposed in writing and not on the fly during question period. I still have not seen a copy of that amendment, so I do not even know what it says.

The Premier has told us that he does not understand his own rule changes, and he has shown us that he does not understand the current rules of the House. Where is his social license now? Is he going to continue to ram these changes through? Is he going to take the time to educate himself and to take these changes back...

Mr. Speaker: Time. Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: That is a minute that none of us will ever get back.

Where to begin with that statement? First off, if he has not seen the amendment... The Opposition House Leader has spoken to our House Leader about the amendment to ensure that members' statements will stay the same. This is something that the member opposite has been



yelling about for the last few days, and we have compromised. We have said that we will leave members' statements as is. We have yet to hear from the opposition as to whether those members will unanimously support this and allow us to present this amendment so they can get what they have been asking for when it comes to members' statements.

Instead of grandstanding, will the member of the opposition confirm that his colleagues will support us unanimously so we can get an amendment and so the thing that he complained about with respect to members' statements will stay the same?

Mr. B. Macdonald: I will tell the Premier that it is my deep concern that we are now part of four years that we are not going to get back.

Even after 24 hours, the Premier does not understand how the process works in this House, and I do not have the time in this minute to educate him on it. However, I would happily do it all weekend. I am around all weekend, and I would be happy to give him a tutorial.

I will tell you that we do agree with freedom of speech. We have said that for a long time. If I see an amendment—maybe, when I see it—I will tell him what I think about the amendment. I have not seen it yet, but I will take him at his word. However, time is running out. Amendments are introduced in writing so that members can read them, consider them, and debate them. That is a basic fact. We are not supposed to be debating things in secret where there is no record. We are supposed to have them on the record so that we can look at them, consider them, and debate them. We agree with that.

We are happy with that amendment, but we want to know what the Premier is going to do about our other concerns. We have mentioned them numerous times. I would like to hear, moving beyond freedom of speech, what else he is going to do to make his changes right.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The condescending tone of the member opposite—saying that he is going to educate me and educate people and saying that I have admitted things, which, clearly, is not the case, in that I have not admitted them—is not helpful and is not constructive.

He says that he wants to see the amendment. The Opposition House Leader was spoken with by the House Leader on our side about working together to get an amendment unanimously passed to help with the concern that the opposition has about members' statements. The member may want to talk to his colleague the Opposition House Leader about that.

I have to say I am a bit concerned that the member opposite keeps trying to say that we are against democracy. In fact, what we are trying to do is improve it. We have taken a suggestion from the third party. We have taken a suggestion from the opposition. We will wait to see whether they are going to help us pass it. We are willing to compromise because we want to



improve our democratic institutions. We think it is important, we think it can be done, and we have to work to have that happen.

Mr. B. Macdonald: I am glad that the Premier has condescended to us, to tell us that we can actually have freedom of speech back. I appreciate that. When I see the amendment through due process, I am sure that I will give him a comment on it. However, after all this discussion, he still does not understand the fundamental rules.

If nothing else, we have shown the importance of question period this week. It is my concern that one of the problems with the rule changes is that they are going to limit the number of days of sitting in this Legislature and they are going to limit the number of question periods.

Just as with the Jobs Board, he asked for one and he got three. He has given us one—freedom of speech—back. How about three more things? How about going with a sessional calendar? How about making some fundamental changes to the way that committees are being run and restoring those rights to members? How about he stop talking about deferring votes and go back to the fundamental principle that matters are debated and voted on once the debate is concluded?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I have said before, we are trying to improve our democratic institution here in the province, and that is why we are prepared to work with the other parties in the House. We have worked with the member of the third party in the House and official opposition members to introduce an amendment on one of the concerns they had. So, we are prepared to work with them.

[Original]

I have to say that, when I listened to the statement by the member of the opposition about having the Deputy Premier on this side be the only voice for Fredericton, it really clicked that the opposition does not understand that, in our government, all of us speak for all New Brunswickers. We want to involve all New Brunswickers and improve the lives of all New Brunswickers, not one region.

I think it is pretty clear why the member opposite is doing that. We all know that he has intentions to run federally. I really hope he is not going to use his position as an MLA and his time on the floor of the Legislature to try to advance his other federal career. The people of New Brunswick deserve better.

Mr. Speaker: The time for question period has expired. We have had a request to revert to Introduction of Guests. Do we have unanimous consent?

