

March 17, 2015

[Original]

Jobs

Mr. Fitch: When our PC government left office last September, there were 354 100 jobs in New Brunswick. Under the Premier's watch, today, that number has dropped to 352 400. There were 299 900 full-time jobs when we left office. Under the Premier's watch, that figure has dropped to 296 800. When we left office, the unemployment rate was 9.6%. Under the Premier's watch, that figure has risen to 10.4%.

Looking at these real numbers today, thus far in the Premier's mandate, with an increase in unemployment and a decrease in the number of jobs, would the Premier agree that his economic performance has been disappointing?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: A week ago, when statistics indicated that there had been significant job growth in the province, opposition members were saying it was because of the policies they had implemented when they formed the previous government.

[Original]

One week ago, the opposition members were actually trying to take credit for the job numbers that we had a week ago, saying their policies created them. Now, one week later, they want to shift and say that it is all due to us. If there is growth in the job numbers in the next round of findings from Statistics Canada, the opposition members will say that it is because of them.

While they are trying to place blame and take credit, we are going to continue to work with New Brunswickers, entrepreneurs, and businesses to create the climate for job creation to happen in our province. In fact, since we took office, since we were sworn in as a government, there have been 400 jobs produced by the New Brunswick economy. This is because of the hard work of New Brunswickers. We are going to continue to focus on job creation, and, with their help, I am sure that we will be able to accomplish it. Thank you.

Mr. Fitch: Last week, we were unable to get the Premier to answer many questions and, in fact, he asked quite a few questions. If he wants to take a nostalgic trip back to the opposition benches, we would be more than happy to welcome him over here, especially since the legislation on crossing the floor is on the docket.

There are 4 600 fewer jobs in New Brunswick than there were a year ago. That is the reality. There are 4 400 fewer full-time jobs than there were a year ago. The Premier's policies on



driving SWN Resources Canada away and on putting economic development efforts in the province on hold for the past six months is the reality.

Last week, it was disappointing to learn that the Premier's promise to give a job to 1 500 young people through the Youth Employment Fund failed to live up to expectations. What was promised, having the application on the Web site and having young people start work on April 1, has not materialized. Will the Premier tell us this today: Are you going to keep the promise of having young people employed under the Youth Employment Fund, or is it going to happen...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Since we were sworn in as the government of New Brunswick, 400 jobs have been created; that is the reality. We are going to continue to prioritize job creation and work with New Brunswick people and businesses to create a favourable environment for economic growth.

[*Original*]

We have talked about all these issues before, so I will take this time to mention some of the things that we are doing to do just that. They include lowering the small business tax and creating Opportunities New Brunswick and the Jobs Board, which is led by a phenomenal team of people who come from the private sector. We are creating the Youth Employment Fund, and it is going to be up and running soon. We have regional cooperation on projects such as the Energy East Pipeline project. We are supporting the Sisson mine, the LNG terminal conversion, and fisheries and seafood. Just in the past few days, the minister and I were at the seafood show in Boston. I can tell you that there is positive momentum because of our focus on job creation, and we are going to get it done.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: It is interesting that, when we ask the Premier about job creation initiatives, we are treated to that well-rehearsed list of speaking points that includes Opportunities New Brunswick and the mythical Youth Employment Fund. The Premier recaps all the natural resource projects that the Progressive Conservative government had been working on and put in motion. Then, of course, all the MLAs applaud on cue, just as good backbenchers and new ministers would.

The one thing that the Premier forgot to mention in his list of things was Innovation Week. When we were in government, we worked on innovation 52 weeks of the year. We did not save it for 1 week of the year. Again, just to be helpful and to give credit where credit is due, could the Premier give us the date so that we can reserve it in our calendars? When is Innovation



Week going to be this year so that we can block off that one week for innovation under this government's watch?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is as if the opposition were saying: Since this is the Semaine nationale de la francophonie, that means we only celebrate Francophonie one week a year. That is not the case at all; quite frankly, it is a bit ridiculous.

[*Original*]

We are really wasting the time of New Brunswick taxpayers who are paying us to be in the Legislature. Having a member of the opposition take Saint Patrick's Day and make a member's statement to politicize Saint Patrick's Day is really unfortunate. Saying that they are disappointed with the budget that has not even come out yet is unfortunate as well. March 31 is the date of the budget, and they are already saying that they are disappointed with it. That is the type of opposition that they are trying to be.

They do not want to work with us, unfortunately, and it is too bad because we have admitted that the last government did some great things on innovation. We are going to do some things differently, but we are going to continue it. They also looked at some natural resource and energy projects that we support. Why can we not talk about those and how we can work together when talking about the one issue that they think divide us the most, which is hydraulic fracturing? We need more from the opposition, and New Brunswick deserves it.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: We need more from the Premier too. We need a couple of answers here in question period.

Youth unemployment has been an ongoing concern in our province. We worked on it and continue to work on it, and that is why it was so disappointing that a program promised in the Liberal election platform is not on time and not on track. Last week, my colleague from Portland-Simonds was unable to get an answer on a very, very important initiative that was under our watch, the One-Job Pledge. That is a program that we introduced, and it created 1 000 jobs for young people here in New Brunswick. Those were permanent jobs.

I wonder whether the Premier could make a commitment today. Is he going to continue the One-Job Pledge, which was so successful, or is he going to scrap it just because there was a PC label on it?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The One-Job Pledge will continue.



Mr. Fitch: It is good to see that the Premier is finally softening up under our barrage of questions and that he has answered one good question. That is the first good answer—that is the only answer—that we have received in the House in many, many weeks.

Under the number of jobs lost under the Premier, it is discouraging to see the unemployment rate rise. There is one number that is of very much concern to us, and that is the number 41 000. There are 41 000 people looking for work in New Brunswick. It is going to create a lot more work and a lot more effort to put those 41 000 people to work.

For instance, JDI is forecasting that 7 800 positions will open in its company over the next three years. That is largely due to the PC forestry program that we put forward.

Can the Premier allow the Minister of Natural Resources to stand up in public to say that he will not be making...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: That will not be the case; there will be changes with regard to forestry. Of course, we will keep doing what works well, and we will also listen to people's interests and concerns to enhance the strategy. It is very simple.

I know opposition members find it really difficult to believe that we are perhaps not going to support everything their government did when it was in office. That is politics; our priorities differ from those of the previous government.

[*Original*]

It is very clear and almost ironic that the opposition member, when he was the Minister of Economic Development, was actually the minister of a government that, for the first time in 40 years, was unable to create a net gain of jobs. Now, he gets up in his new role as the opposition critic and tries to criticize the work that we are doing, despite the fact that, since we were sworn in, 400 jobs have been produced by the economy here in New Brunswick. We are very proud of that, and we are going to continue to work with the people of New Brunswick to create jobs in our beautiful province.

Mr. Fitch: Again, the numbers do not lie. We see the Premier backtracking from his talking points of last month.

There is one area where the Premier seems to be doing quite well at job creation, and it is one that we are a little bit concerned about, because it does affect the job numbers. When we were in government making decisions, through attrition, we shrank the number of civil servants here in the province. We shrank it by approximately 2 300 through attrition and retirement. Under



the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, we received from the Premier... I must admit that I did have to remind him here in the House that time was running out and that he had to come forward with that information under the RTI request. That information was released to us. In the midst of new hires... In the information we received under the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, it was stated that there were 1 900 new hires here in the province. I wonder if the Premier could confirm this here today. Were there, in fact, 1 900 new hires in the civil service, or was the information that he gave us under the RTI request inaccurate?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: One day, the opposition members say that we are going too hard when it comes to the Strategic Program Review.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: They say that we are going too fast and too deep when it comes to getting our expenses under control as a government, or when it comes to putting our finances in order. Now, today, just because the opposition members need a headline, they are saying that we are not going far enough. They want us to cut more. They want us to find more ways to find savings. The opposition members are clearly taking their role as one that is political. They are trying to get headlines, trying to make political statements out of Saint Patrick's Day.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: What we are doing is focused on creating jobs, focused on growing the economy. We are not going to take credit or blame; that is not what we are here to do. We are not going to throw credit or blame at the opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We will give the credit to New Brunswickers who are working hard, to businesses that are being started, to businesses that are renovating and trying to expand. These are the people who are creating jobs. We are simply going to work with them to help them create some momentum and continue that momentum.

[Translation]

Health

Ms. Dubé: It is very rare for an interest group to publicly give notice that it might take the government to court. We know that the *Égalité santé en français N.-B.* group, which is very well known in New Brunswick, has asked multiple times to meet with the Minister of Health since the last election in September. Representatives of the group have asked again and again to meet with the minister, but this meeting has not yet taken place.



So, my question is for the Minister of Health. Now that you know that you could be taken to court, and in order to avoid a lawsuit, will you finally sit down with the Égalité santé en français N.-B. group for a straightforward face-to-face meeting and discussion with its representatives?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I can assure you that no one is sitting idle at the Department of Health and that several meetings and discussions are taking place. As Minister responsible for Strategic Program Review, I did a provincial tour, and I met hundreds of people in 14 different communities. We have met with interest groups at five different meetings. At the Department of Health, I meet with interest groups regularly, just as I do for the Regional Development Corporation.

So, if the member thinks I am not doing my job as minister, I can reassure her; if she wants to take a look at my schedule, she will see that we are working hard. In fact, all ministers and private members on our side of the House are working hard. Whenever possible, we meet with groups who request meetings, but there is always a backlog of requests, and we...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: If we sum up the activities since the Liberal government took office last fall, the Minister of Health did in fact have several meetings with all the other partners in health. However, Vitalité Health Network had to wait until the last minute to get a meeting, since its CEO was fired. As for Égalité santé en français N.-B., it is an extremely important group in the province.

We have an extremely worried Francophone community since the last comments made by the Minister of Health and since the Liberal government was elected; so, it should be a priority for the minister to sit down with representatives of Égalité santé en français N.-B. After asking the Premier 14 times for a meeting, this group is still waiting, and, now, it has to threaten the government with legal action to get a meeting.

I am going to ask my first question again: When will you sit down and actually make this meeting a priority to avoid paying more legal fees?

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Address the Chair.



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: As I have said, we are trying to meet with as many stakeholder groups as possible. I get requests for meetings every day and every week, and we try to plan them properly. Sometimes, more time is needed to meet with certain groups, compared to others. I can tell you that there are still many groups who are asking to meet with me as minister and whose requests I still have not been able to accept, given the work schedule in the House and our other responsibilities.

However, we are having discussions and talks with representatives of this group, and we will try to respond to their request as best we can. You are implying that we are twiddling our thumbs here, on the government side, but that is not the case at all. We are working hard and meeting with people from all walks of life to make sure that, as a government, we are addressing the priorities of New Brunswickers.

Ms. Dubé: Representatives of this group have repeatedly asked to meet with the Minister of Health. The budget will be tabled on March 31, and, throughout the province, the Francophone community is excessively worried about the future of health care services.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Please address the Chair.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: My next question will be for the Premier. At one point, you told Égalité santé en français N.-B. that you would in fact set up a meeting. Can the Premier bring his minister back into line and, to avoid legal fees—that is what we are talking about today—require that he meet with the Égalité santé en français N.-B. group right away?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The member constantly refers to a lawsuit, and she is very well aware that, as a minister, I cannot talk about that. She is also aware that the group she is talking about regularly meets with the person who is taking the government to court.

Maybe the member should also check on who is representing the group she is talking about and who is representing the person who is taking the government to court. This is why we set certain conditions for the meeting. I am prepared to meet with the group; I have said so many times in correspondence, but we cannot discuss the lawsuit that all the opposition members would like to discuss. I maintain a firm stance on this.



[Original]

Natural Gas

Mr. Stewart: We see yet another example of this government making up policy on the fly. On Sunday, the Minister of Energy and Mines provided SWN Resources Canada with not the six-year license extension it had applied for but, rather, a one-year extension. Now, before anyone gets the false impression that this was the minister laying down the law, be assured that this was simply another Liberal mistake that saw the government fail to pass its own bill that was designed specifically to provide SWN with a multi-year extension of its current leases.

My question is for the minister. To clarify, the minister gave SWN a one-year license extension after it sent the minister a letter stating that it was suspending the work scheduled for the year in question and it would be moving resources out of the province.

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: The opposition members do not know whether they are coming or going. Last week, it was fear-mongering, telling the people of New Brunswick and elsewhere that SWN wanted to pick up and leave and never come back. Fortunately, we read the letters to them. SWN was committed to New Brunswick. That is why it asked for an extension. Now, this week, the member opposite seems to want SWN to leave New Brunswick, to prove the point the members opposite had last week, which is not the case.

Under the current legislation, I have the authority to extend a license to search by one year. SWN has asked for an extension of six years. Under current legislation, that cannot happen and that is why it was extended for a year.

Mr. Stewart: Once again, no answer. It appears that the minister's strategy for SWN is to expect this \$9-billion company to put everything on hold on a year-to-year basis and to check in each year to see whether the Liberals have actually made some sense out of its incoherent policies.

The minister's role is to create jobs and invest, or, at least, that is what the Premier claimed. It is hard to know what the reality is anymore, given the habit of the Premier and the minister to withhold information. However, if that is his role, one would think that the minister would have made sure that the request from SWN for a long-term extension was granted, since SWN made it clear that future investment would not occur without it. Can the minister explain why the government took a two-week break from the House—a move that ensured that SWN would be restricted to a one-year extension instead of the long-term extension that it stated would be required for further investment?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: It is obvious that the member opposite has never been a minister, or he would know the role of a minister. The role of a minister is to make responsible decisions.

We have been listening to New Brunswickers. For the last two and a half years, we have talked about putting forward a moratorium. We have talked about respecting the duty to consult with



First Nations, about getting the right social license, about getting the right infrastructure to treat wastewater, and about making sure that the decisions we make do not affect the quality of our air or our water. That is being a minister. That is making the right decisions in a responsible manner.

Yes, we did give SWN an extension of one year, but I can assure you that those five conditions remain and that there will be no hydraulic fracturing in New Brunswick.

Mr. Stewart: It is funny that last night's statement on CTV claimed that until the conditions were understood... Interesting.

Again, SWN stated very clearly that it would require a long-term extension for future investment. The current government had plenty of time to formulate its plan for implementing a moratorium, but, after four years in opposition and five months of being in government, the Liberals were somehow unable to draft a bill and pass it before SWN's license expired. This forced the minister to give SWN the only extension he could—for one year. By failing to pass Bill 9 before SWN's license expired, the government ensured that SWN could not receive the long-term extension that the Premier and the minister knew the company required in order to consider reinvestment in the province.

It begs the question: Was this license-extension debacle incompetence at play, or is the government intentionally driving companies out of New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: The only incompetence at play is on the official opposition side. If, tomorrow, there were no more *Telegraph-Journal*, I do not know where in the world those members would get their questions.

I think that, as a government, we have been very responsible. In fact, when you speak of passing legislation, we brought forward legislation on December 18. The fact that the opposition wanted to waste New Brunswickers' time filibustering these bills instead of having them pass at second reading and then move on to Committee of the Whole, third reading, and royal assent is not the fault of government. That is the official opposition wasting the taxpayers' time.

Tourism

Mr. Wetmore: The Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick (TIANB) is the leading advocate for tourism issues in our province, and we are lucky to have it. It is a representative and industry-driven organization, and it provides leadership and direction, working with partners and stakeholders at the provincial, Atlantic, and national levels to ensure the continued success of a competitive, progressive, and sustainable business environment. It is a strong voice, and it is focused on fostering the health and sustained growth of the tourism industry. It is a priceless tool for the minister.



My question, for the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, is this: Could he please advise the House as to whether he has had a meeting with TIANB, where and when it was held, and who attended the meeting?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. In fact, I have had many meetings with the Executive Director and the President of TIANB. This association is a strategic partner of ours. We want to work with it, and we want to work toward building our tourism sector in the province. TIANB is a very valuable partner of ours.

Certainly, tourism is a sector that creates millions of dollars in our economy, and it is an economic generator for our province. That is going to help us to create jobs and to help our families, which is the goal of our government.

Mr. Wetmore: The director must have lost his schedule book, because I do not think he has seen it.

I am afraid I know the answer to my next question, but I will ask anyway. It involves TIANB and the tourism marketing fund. On the TIANB Web site, there is an update from September 2014 regarding the tourism marketing fund. It is well worth reading if the minister has not taken the time to do so already.

Will the minister advise the House as to what progress, if any, has been made and what meetings, if any, are planned to move forward on the tourism marketing fund file?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: Again, the focus of our government is on creating jobs and growing our economy so that we can help our families. Tourism will play an integral role in that. Working with our partners, like TIANB and other partners, we are very strategic in achieving those goals. We have had several meetings with them. We continue to have discussions with them and with other stakeholders across the province with regard to a tourism marketing fund. No decisions have been made yet, but we are certainly working with our partners to come up with a plan that is going to help us grow our economy and our tourism market in the future. Thank you.

Mr. Wetmore: That is a long preamble to no.

In November 2012, our Progressive Conservative government invited the Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick to make a presentation to the government on issues regarding signage and how those issues impacted the membership of TIANB. Feedback generated from that exercise was considered in the development of our new sign policy. In the fall of 2014, there was to be a follow-up meeting with TIANB and stakeholders to revisit signage, discuss the progress that was made, and consider any future improvements that are required.

Will the minister advise the House as to whether this meeting was ever held? If not, when is it going to be scheduled?



Hon. Mr. Fraser: Again, the members opposite are talking about meetings. The Minister of Health was questioned about meetings. My schedule is just as busy as all the ministers' schedules on this side of the House.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I have been busy travelling the province and meeting with groups all over the province.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: During the March break, I spent five days visiting eight communities and over 150 stakeholders to talk about economic development, about tourism, and about other initiatives.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Fraser: TIANB is a strategic partner of ours. We have been working very closely with those people. We are going to work with that group and other stakeholders in the province.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: They are going to help us achieve our goal of creating jobs and growing our economy. Thank you.

Northern New Brunswick

Mr. K. MacDonald: The minister certainly has been very busy touring the province with his invitation-only meetings.

Recently, the Minister responsible for the northern and Miramichi economic development funds advised us that he had wrapped up his northern consultation tour. There were a couple of things that he mentioned that caught my attention. At one point, he said that he wanted to have a frank and open discussion. Perhaps I was misinformed. It was my understanding that these meetings were by invitation only. That does not sound very open to me. Can the minister



correct me if I am wrong? Also, will the minister advise this House as to which businesses participated in this frank and open discussion?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: It is a great pleasure to be able to stand in the House to explain a little bit about the discussion tour that we had to discuss the northern and Miramichi economic development funds. We visited eight communities over the March break. We were in Tracadie-Sheila, Caraquet, Beresford, Campbellton, Grand Falls, Edmundston, and Richibucto, and we finished up in Miramichi. We met with municipal leaders, CBDCs, chamber of commerce groups, business leaders in the community, and other leaders in the community.

We met with over 150 stakeholders over the March break, and we had great discussions. Many positive suggestions came forward on how we can grow our economy. It is very clear that, in the past, under your leadership, under the former government's leadership, we were not successful.

Mr. Speaker: Please address the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: In the future, we want to be successful, and we are going to be successful by working with all those people all around the north.

Mr. K. MacDonald: The minister certainly kissed the Blarney Stone this morning, to carry on with the Saint Patrick analogy.

I wonder whether there was a receipt book for donations to the Liberal Party anywhere near these invitation-only meetings. This minister does not have an admirable track record when it comes to investing taxpayers' money in economic projects, at least not as part of the previous Liberal government. Atcon springs to mind, but we will be hearing more about this from the Auditor General in the very near future.

Will the minister inform this House as to whether any of the players in the Atcon scandal were invited to attend these open meetings?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: For question period to be more productive in the future, given the questions by the opposition, we will actually bring our schedulers, and they can take our seats. The opposition members can ask all the questions they would like about where we are going, what times our meetings are, and who was there.

We have some serious concerns, and I believe—I really believe from the bottom of my heart—that when people get into politics, they do so because they want to make a difference. They want to help their community, they want to help their province, and they want to help their country. However, sometimes, I have to say that, when we go through question period, I have to question my belief. The number of questions we are getting that are a waste of time in this Legislature is appalling.



We, as a province, have a real, serious fiscal challenge before us. Over the past few years, we have seen no economic growth...

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: ...or virtually no economic growth, and no job creation. There are families across our province that are struggling and living in poverty. While the members opposite are asking about our schedules, we are going to focus on creating jobs for New Brunswickers.

Mr. Speaker: This is the final question.

Mr. K. MacDonald: I see that the minister needed help to answer the question.

When we talk about job creation, it is important that we remind the Liberal Party of some of its history with that file. There is the Atcon file, which cost the taxpayers of New Brunswick millions and millions of dollars, and there are the minister's antics in his own riding with regard to Giant Tiger and whatnot. Forgive us if we are a little skeptical.

My final question about the invitation-only meetings is this: Will the minister advise the House as to whether any businesses or other persons asked whether they could attend, but were declined the opportunity to take part?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am very proud of our team on the government side. I am very proud of the ministers. I am also proud that they try, as much as possible, to have discussions with New Brunswickers. I am very satisfied, and we are very fortunate, because many New Brunswickers want to join the conversation and discussion about how to overcome the challenges we are facing.

[*Original*]

We have serious challenges, and I am very happy with the team we have that is working very hard to overcome these challenges. We are working with New Brunswickers, and we are very lucky to have had many of them participate with their ideas, suggestions, and concerns. I really hope that the opposition members are going to follow suit and follow New Brunswickers across the province, from community to community. New Brunswickers want us to work together, to create jobs, to tackle our fiscal challenges, and to help families. Too many of our families around the province are struggling, and that is why we are going to continue to be focused.

If the members opposite want to talk about schedules, we will get the right people in this room so that they can talk to them.

