

April 23, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: I am going to help the Premier to remember some of the things that he has forgotten. On June 20, 2014, in Moncton, the Premier and his entourage arrived at the AGM of the seniors' coalition. It was held at Peoples Park Tower on St. George Boulevard. It was in the Rose Hall, to be precise. I am hoping that this may jog his memory a little.

The Premier was actually moved up on the agenda to speak because he was in a hurry to get to Prince Edward Island for another event. The Liberal candidate, who is now the Minister of Social Development, was among the political people on hand. You will never guess who was there among the entourage of the Premier. It was the now Minister of Finance. Can the Premier tell us who else from his Cabinet and his caucus were present at that meeting?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I remember the speech quite well. In fact, as was said, Minister Melanson and Minister Rogers as well as MLA Monique LeBlanc were present. We had many of our candidates present as well. It was a nice opportunity to be able to speak to seniors and to talk about our commitment to want to support them as best as possible.

I remember the speech quite well, where I spoke about my grandparents, despite the minute that was given to the Leader of the Opposition yesterday by the advocate, Cecile Cassista. I spoke about my grandparents more than my parents because I lived with them and I saw how tough it is for seniors to be able to make ends meet. They calculate every dollar to the last cent. As my grandparents suffered from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, my family and I certainly did the best that we could to support them in their last days.

That is what I spoke about during the event. I made it very clear that, if I formed a government with my colleagues, we would continue to help seniors as best we could, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Fitch: I think that the telling word is "as best we could". He certainly has deviated from that because he has made choices. He has made choices to spend money in other areas and choices to take money from the seniors. We know that the member for Moncton Southwest, from our side, and Sue Stultz, former Minister of Social Development, were there, and they remember the story about the grandparents and the parents. That is fine, but they also remember the fact that he did say: We will not touch the seniors' assets.

I wonder whether the Premier... He has now had 24 hours to reconsider the remarks. Initially, he said to us: Produce something written, and we will comment on it. Now, we have produced something written. Again, these are the minutes from the AGM. I hope that the Premier is not inferring that the minutes from the AGM were fabricated by this association, because they do



specifically say: “He will not touch the assets.” Please tell the seniors that you are sorry. You made that promise, and you broke it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: In my campaign speeches, in our platform, and in our discussions with people while going door-to-door, we absolutely did not give the impression that we were not going to be making changes to enable us to address our financial challenges. There is no doubt about it; we very clearly stated that we had difficult decisions to make.

[*Original*]

I have made it very clear in answering the member opposite already that, during my speeches, during the campaign, and in our platform, I never did say that I would not ask those who are more capable of paying to contribute a bit more. That would include people in nursing homes. I never said that that would not be the case.

I did say that we would protect the most vulnerable. I did say that we would ensure that our policies would be progressive. I did say that we were going to make difficult decisions to get our finances in order so that we can provide strong social programs like education, health care, and senior care for many years to come in our beautiful province.

Mr. Fitch: This is just getting to be a little too much. Again, the Premier promised the seniors that he would not touch their assets. There were 100 people in the room who heard him say that. Some people on our side were present as well. MLAs in this House heard him say it.

I would have to go back and agree with the remarks that were made by Norbert Cunningham earlier this week. He said: “Premier Gallant’s government has broken what public trust he cultivated. Why should anyone believe him anymore?” I am sure that none of the seniors are putting any stock in the claims made by this Premier or by any of his ministers, for that matter. They are guilty by association.

There is only one way—and we are trying to help—that the Premier can regain that trust and credibility. It is to admit the truth, admit the fact that he said he would not touch the assets. Apologize to the seniors, and rethink this whole policy on attacking seniors’ assets. Reverse it, and make some other choices that would be better for New Brunswick with respect to the seniors’ assets.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I made it very clear. If there is a quote or if there is a citation that I said, I would be more than willing to clarify. However, I have made it very clear that, during my speeches and, again, in the platform of our party, we never mentioned that we would not ask those who are able to pay, to pay a little bit more. I have answered the question time and time again.



I understand that people do not really like to trust politicians. It is unfortunate. It is what it is, and we will do the best we can to show New Brunswickers that we are working hard on their behalf and that we are going to fulfill the commitments that we made to them. We will do the best we can.

I understand why New Brunswickers do not trust politicians. They had four years of the member opposite in government.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The past government broke every single one of its promises. Those members said that they would create jobs. They were the only government in 40 years not to do so. They said that they would get our finances in order. They missed every single one of the promises that they made when it came to deficit reduction.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: They did not better the lives of New Brunswickers. We will do what we can to make that the case.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: Once again, we have the Premier not telling the facts the way they really are. He says that every single one of the promises was broken by this former government, but I know for a fact—and every member on this side knows for a fact—that is not the case at all.

When it comes to trust and the Premier saying it is what it is, again, he has perpetuated that situation because he said one thing and, now, he is doing another. He said one thing in front of 100 seniors. He said one thing in front of a number of members of Cabinet, former Cabinet members, and MLAs who are here on the floor. Now, he is doing exactly the opposite. All he has to do to try to regain some of that trust that he has squandered is to stand up, admit what he said, apologize, and rethink this policy.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, I have answered this question several times. If there is a quote the members of the opposition would like me to clarify, I would be happy to do so.



[Original]

I have to take issue with what the member opposite said about the previous government. He is certainly trying to rewrite history. He certainly does not have a very good memory. It is very clear that the three key principles, the three key promises made by the previous government, were broken. Those members said they would balance the books within four years. Ha. Unfortunately, that did not happen. They said that they were focused on job creation.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: They were the only government in 40 years not to have a net gain of jobs throughout their mandate. They said they would not raise taxes when they were elected in 2010, but they had the largest tax increase in the history of our province. We have no lessons to learn from the member opposite.

If he provides me with a quote, I will clarify the quote. We do not have to ask that of the opposition members because we saw their platform when they ran in 2010 and we saw the promises they broke, written in black on white.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order

Mr. Fitch: Again, we see that the Premier has been backed into a corner. Now, he is getting aggressive, coming out and trying to rewrite history, as he has said himself. In reply to the previous question, he said every single promise. Now, he is back to three key promises. Again, his Cabinet has come to his defence. His backbenchers, who are largely forgotten in this whole dialogue, are coming to his defence.

Let's get to the point at hand. If the Premier is not going to respect the House, if he is not going to respect question period, if he is dodging and throwing out allegations that this was not recorded... It was recorded at an annual general meeting of an association. The Premier is bringing those people's integrity into question because he is trying to protect his own integrity, which he has lost.

Will the Premier agree to bring the estimates of Social Development to the floor of the House? Let's have a real debate on the choices that have been made by this government and on how they have affected the people of New Brunswick. Let's bring the Social Development estimates here as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.



Hon. Mr. Gallant: We will be very glad to bring the Social Development estimates to the floor of the Legislature. That will be happening very shortly. We look forward to talking to New Brunswickers about all the difficult decisions we have made and also about the strategic investments we have made in this budget to grow the economy, to create jobs, and to help families that are struggling across the province. We are very keen to do that, and we are very excited to be able to clarify a lot of the numbers.

Again, I have answered the question numerous times. I have made it very clear that in no speech did I say that I would not ask those who are able to pay a little bit more to do so. It was not in our platform. It was not in any speech that I delivered, before or during the campaign. If anybody would like to show me a citation or quote that I said that would maybe give a different impression, I would be glad to clarify it.

With that said, I have to take issue with what was said by the member opposite. Those members made it very clear that they would balance the books when they were in government, that they would do so without raising taxes, and that they would also create jobs. They did not do one of those three things, so we have no lessons to learn from the member opposite.

Mr. Fitch: You can learn from seniors, that is for sure. We were taught to respect our elders.

This group does not even plan to balance the budget within its mandate. Again, we are going to ask the Premier to commit to bringing forward the Social Development estimates on Tuesday of next week. Let's get to the bottom of this so that we can again discuss some of the issues that are important to the seniors who have been listening in. They have been aghast at the fact that the Premier is denying what they heard in front of a number of different people.

Will the Premier commit to bringing the estimates of Social Development to the floor of the Legislature on Tuesday of next week so that we can get to the bottom of this? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not the one who sets the schedule for the consideration of estimates. Officials from each department come to answer questions from the opposition regarding our budget, which is aimed at providing more assistance for families and creating jobs. Of course, Department of Social Development officials will come to the House very soon to take part in this exercise.

[Original]

I would like to take a minute to remind the opposition of what we have been focused on within our first 200 days. They have been harping on how they do not think we have been working very hard.



We have made it very clear that we have a plan to create jobs. We have lowered the small business tax. We have ensured that we have helped to develop a skilled workforce in the province by creating the Youth Employment Fund, by starting a literacy strategy, by having an education plan, and by raising the minimum wage. We are making sure that we have postsecondary education that is more affordable by eliminating parental and spousal contributions. We have also increased the small business investor tax credit and renewed the northern and Miramichi funds. That is how we have been focused on jobs.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

School Closures

Mr. Crossman: The community of Dorchester received some good news on Tuesday night from the district education council of the Anglophone East School District. I view it as a reprieve for the school. The people were certainly put on notice that it might be different the next time around. That is what all communities with schools that are undergoing review under Policy 409 are asking for.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education whether he has given more consideration to the request on behalf of people who want to work to make their schools part of the future of their communities. On their behalf, I ask the minister to please cancel permanent school closures until a 10-year education policy has been developed and put into action.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: First of all, I would like to thank the member for Hampton for his question. After almost seven months in government, I was starting to wonder about the importance the opposition places on education. So, really, I offer you my sincere thanks.

That being said, we have had interesting discussions about Policy 409, which has been discussed extensively. A lot of consultation went into creating this policy. This policy offers the advantage of involving people in the communities. For example, in the case of Dorchester, we have just seen that people were consulted, after which the District Education Council made a decision.

As I have already mentioned when we were debating Policy 409, very precise criteria must be considered. This process requires at least three public consultations, so we are seeing here a process that works very well. I am planning on maintaining this process.

[Original]

Mr. Crossman: I have attended a lot of meetings and have listened to what people are saying. It is important to remember that, first and foremost, the government members believe in closing schools and not in what is best for the children, especially the youngest children. These people are concerned about their communities. I have been to a lot of them. They are also concerned



about the harm of closing their schools and the costs over the long term. I know that the minister has closures for Coles Island, Pennfield, and Lorne Middle School under consideration. Will the minister explain how much weight he will give to the possible harm to these communities when making his final decision on the fate of these schools?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As I said before, there are very precise criteria in Policy 409. I intend to look at these criteria and to make sure that due process is followed. It is my job to do so. I will look at all these different criteria. I will make sure that the process has been followed as it has to be. I want to reassure the MLA for Hampton that I will follow Policy 409 very, very strictly. Thank you.

Mr. Crossman: I am sure that having the fate of our community in your hands is a heavy burden to bear. That is why I hope that the minister will look at ways to say yes to these communities, rather than reasons to say no through the Policy 409 procedure.

The other fact that I hope has a great bearing on the minister's decision will be the well-being of small children. There is just no way that the excessive travel time and the long distances can be good for these children, for sure. Does the minister have any evidence or reference material to support the notion that travelling two or three hours on a school bus every day will not have long-lasting negative effects on the children?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I will repeat what I said. By the way, I thank you again for the question, since it gives me the opportunity to clarify certain things.

The various components of Policy 409 are very clear, and I have an obligation to ensure they are considered. I encourage the member for Hampton to reread Policy 409 so that he understands exactly what my job is. It is to make sure that we have in fact met the various criteria. So, public consultations must be held, as provided for. All I have to do is find out whether all these components have been considered. This enables us to make sure the process has been applied equitably.

So, once again, I encourage the opposition member and all his colleagues to very carefully reread Policy 409, which explains exactly what must be done. I will reiterate that this is an excellent policy, and we are going to continue to apply it. It is, in fact, a policy that has been applied many times...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Public Transportation System

Mr. Coon: Earlier this week, the federal government released the emissions inventory for Canada. New Brunswick's emissions are included in that. Since 1990, our emissions from electricity generation have been going down in terms of carbon pollution because of the high price of oil that we have been experiencing. We have been phasing out oil to generate electricity, which is positive.

On the other side, our emissions from transportation have been going up and now represent one third of all our carbon pollution emissions in New Brunswick. My question for the Premier is this: What will he do to cut these high carbon pollution levels from the transportation sector?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: As you know, we just came back from the climate summit in Quebec City. Finding ways to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and improve our air quality is definitely on our radar in New Brunswick. We are working on many issues with the Department of Energy and with our transportation sector to improve our highways.

In fact, a few weeks ago, I hosted an electric car symposium here in the province to have experts from around the province and throughout Canada speak about how we can find ways to improve our transportation sector.

Yesterday was Earth Day. We made statements in the House about promoting the effective use of public transportation. There are many sectors that we are looking at to combat climate change in the province. I will work with the member opposite on some ideas that he has. It is a good dialogue...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: UNBSJ's Dr. Yves Bourgeois did a report in 2014 looking at the cost of car dependence in New Brunswick. Our bare-bones public transportation service means that the cost of working is higher here than it is in the rest of Canada. Low-income New Brunswickers pay 17% of their income for transportation, compared to 11% for other low-income Canadians. Why? Because there are few alternatives to driving. That is why we have 5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

I have met two people who moved to New Brunswick for work who had never owned a vehicle but say that they were forced to buy cars because of inadequate transit.

Will the Premier establish a dedicated fund to invest in public transportation, financed by a small fee on fossil fuel imports to this province?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: In the past, we have looked at many ways in the province, especially in rural areas... In fact, a few years ago, in Bathurst, I worked with a number of stakeholders to look at ways to improve public transit. One size fits all does not work for New Brunswick on this. Rest



assured that our province, under the leadership of our Premier and our Department of Environment, along with many stakeholders in the province... We have to look at every alternative we have to get more people onto public transit or to carpool. There are a lot of things we can do with public education too.

It is a fact that 30% of our greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation in the province, and we have a duty to combat those issues. It is going to take some time, and it is going to take some leadership. We have to work with all our stakeholders throughout the province to find ways to do it. I will work with the member opposite if he has some good ideas. I am definitely open to suggestions. That is why we went to the climate change action summit in Quebec, to be able to look at these ideas and share these ideas...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: According to Dr. Bourgeois's study, it costs the equivalent of \$5.74 per hour from a person's wages to maintain a compact vehicle. If you are living on minimum wage, that leaves just \$4.60 per hour to pay for child care, food, clothing, and shelter, before taxes. You can see why it is so expensive for people in New Brunswick to get to work.

We need a convenient system of public transportation in this province to provide an alternative to the high cost of driving and to cut our carbon pollution. While our overall carbon emissions have now fallen by 5%, below 1990's, the carbon footprint of driving has grown and the cost for New Brunswickers to get to work, because of our inadequate transportation system, continues to grow.

Will the Premier use his Strategic Infrastructure Initiative to build a public transportation system that actually works, both for people and the environment? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: The member has brought up some good points. That is why we are investing in infrastructure to have better roads, so we can have better and safer transportation in the province. We are also working on improving access to child care. We are improving issues to be able to help families here in New Brunswick.

Our number one priority is to create jobs to help people in need get around the province. Number two is to get our fiscal balance in order. Number three is to be able to help our families. Those are our main priorities. We will do that in conjunction with working with all the people in the province to find ways to have better transportation in the province.

It is a balanced approach. It is about getting families to work in the province, and it is also about reducing climate change here in the province. We are working on all aspects, as the member opposite mentioned. We want to work collaboratively. If you have more ideas about working together, this is the place to bring them up. Meet with me, and let's work together to move our province forward. Thank you.



Education System

Mr. Jody Carr: Bullying, aggressive behaviour, and youth mental health are cited as top issues for Canadian teachers, according to two recent reports. In 2012, the Legislature adopted changes from a committee made up of members of the opposition and stakeholders. It required principals to have more consistent reporting across the province as well as consistent evidence-based intervention across the province.

However, we have seen the government cut the antibullying coordinator position that was created at that time to address these issues. While the incidence of bullying has dropped, nearly 60% of youth aged 10 to 19 have still cited being bullied while in school. Can the minister explain why the antibullying coordinator position has been cut from the Department of Education?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the member opposite. Today is surely a big day. I really appreciate the question.

[Translation]

I must add that I am always surprised when I hear the opposition say that the anti-bullying coordinator position was cut. What I must say is that, for our government, a positive learning environment is very, very important. We are very aware of the important role played by the coordinator who takes care of everything relating to diversity and respect. I think this government shows, and will show again, how important this diversity and respect coordinator position is.

That being said, over the last few months, we have in fact changed the anti-bullying coordinator position to replace it with a new diversity and respect coordinator position. On March 13, we had the opportunity of announcing it to all the staff.

[Original]

Mr. Jody Carr: That is new information. I wish you had responded with that when the local media asked about the status of this position.

Last fall, as well as earlier this year, your department said that the antibullying coordinator position would be filled. Then, on April 17, the position was cancelled. When your department was asked, this information was not provided. I am pleased to hear that the position has been changed to that of respect and diversity. That brings clarity to the issue and the government's commitment with regard to bullying, aggressive behaviour, and youth mental health.

In addition to that, I am told that the department has 17 facilitator teacher positions dealing with mental health, autism, behaviour, training, and teacher support. I am told that these 17 facilitator positions will be eliminated at the end of June.



Can the Minister of Education confirm that these cuts of the 17 facilitator teacher positions dealing with bullying, mental health, autism, and behaviour will take place?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the member opposite for his question, and I will be pleased to answer it when I present my estimates today. I will be really happy to do so.

That being said, I would like to add that, regarding the diversity and respect coordinator position, we really wanted to include very important elements aimed at getting to the source of the problem in settings where bullying occurs. To that end, we wanted to ensure that the person responsible will really be able to cover the entire field and talk, not only about anti-bullying issues, but also about things like sexual orientation, positive learning environments—as I have mentioned—and everything LGBTQ-related; ultimately, we are talking about anything to do with inclusion.

You will understand the importance of this new position that encompasses various roles, because we really want to get to the root of the bullying problem.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Jody Carr: The minister cited the new position that is replacing the old antibullying coordinator. I have acknowledged that, and I am glad to have the information.

However, my further questions are on the 17 provincial facilitator teacher positions that will be eliminated at the end of June. They deal with mental health, autism, behaviour, and teacher training support in the classroom. If you are telling me that you are eliminating 17 positions and replacing them with 1 position, I need that confirmation.

Can you confirm that these cuts of the 17 facilitator teacher positions will occur and that they will happen at the end of June? The positions are dealing with mental health, autism, behaviour, training, and teacher support, which are cited as the top issues of Canadian teachers and as New Brunswick issues. Have these 17 positions been cut and eliminated from your budget?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the opposition member for his question. I want to clarify one thing: In a few moments, I will have the opportunity to answer his questions about the positions he is referring to. That being said, I want to point out that these 17 positions were two-year contracts, as the opposition member is well aware. So, these contracts were aimed at building capacity so that people had the tools to continue their work; therefore, it was about enhancing capacity.



Once again, I would like to point out that it was the previous government, now in opposition, that decided these would be two-year positions. So, the previous government, now the official opposition, awarded two-year contracts.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie: If the Minister of Education were having a test today, he would be getting a zero, because he has not answered one question from the opposition. He can be puzzled and confused all he likes—and I am sure that he was in his school days as well—but the reality is that the people of New Brunswick need to know. Are these positions going to be cut? If the minister is so proud to answer questions in the House, why is he hiding behind his estimates? Why will he not answer this question? It is very simple. Are these 17 positions being cut?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I know that the opposition members are very well aware what answer I am going to give them: We are going to answer this kind of question during estimates. I am surprised to see that people who have spent some 15 years of their lives in the House do not yet know this basic rule, but I am still going to take the time to repeat it, even though I am new in the House.

That being said, I want to repeat that the contracts of these 17 people were for two years, and that they were awarded in order to build capacity in an environment that enabled work to go on. So, it is the current opposition, then in government, that made this decision.

[*Original*]

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

