

May 12, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: The Premier and the Minister of Social Development continue to refuse to answer questions on the disappointing asset grab from seniors. They cannot even answer a simple question such as: Are the RRIF assets included, because the payments are included in income, or not? This policy is driving people out of the province, as was recorded in the media on the weekend.

We learned late last week that the break week that we were supposed to have next week is now actually going to be an estimates week, which is interesting. This morning, I want to ask the Premier whether he will commit—he has said in the past that the Department of Social Development will answer questions during estimates—to bringing the Department of Social Development to the floor of the House, not during the break and estimates week, but during the daytime so that the media and the people can get the answers that they are looking for.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: The Leader of the Opposition knows full well that we follow the procedures of the Legislative Assembly, and he knows full well that every department will be presenting its estimates in due course. He knows full well that all departments need to come in front of the legislators and present how they will be using the taxpayers' dollars in their respective departments. When the Department of Social Development is ready, based on the agenda that is put forward, the minister will be fully interested in presenting all the details of her budget so that New Brunswickers can clearly understand how these dollars will be invested and how these dollars will be helping the most vulnerable of our province.

Mr. Fitch: In the past during question period, the Premier has said that he will bring the estimates forward soon. Late last week, we heard that the break week is now going to be estimates week. It would really be a disservice to the people of New Brunswick, to the seniors of New Brunswick, and to this House if he took that promise of having the estimates done very, very soon and put it off to estimates week, which was formerly the break week. Will the Premier commit to having the Department of Social Development estimates during the sitting hours of the day as opposed to hiding them in the evening or during the break week?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I appreciate the question. The member of the opposition knows what will be happening during the off week. During the off-week meetings, a lot of work will still be done in the Legislature, and he knows full well that committees of the Legislature will be dealing with estimates and not only estimates. There will also be some work done during the week where... The job has to be done. On this side of the House, we are here to work. We are here because we got elected to get a job done, and next week will be a working week for the legislators who are members of these committees.



The Leader of the Opposition also knows that next week's work on the floor of the Legislature will be televised. Cameras will be showing New Brunswickers the work that we will be doing on their behalf. Again, I would appreciate it if the Leader of the Opposition could understand the facts and talk about the facts.

Mr. Fitch: Once again, the minister across the way disrespects question period, disrespects the estimates process, and disrespects the people of New Brunswick. He is concerned about the cameras.

This goes back to how the decisions are made with this particular government. We have had various departments in estimates here. We had Education, Health, and Opportunities New Brunswick before the committee on the floor of the Legislature. The announcements that were made all across this province by this government yesterday were not talked about during the estimates, even though we asked questions on specific things regarding maintenance to schools and new schools. We also asked about some of the concerns regarding the youth mental health clinic and where it was going to be located. Again, there were no details. Now, all of a sudden, on Monday morning, there were many, many announcements.

Can the minister tell us specifically whether it was because CRA polling was in the field that the government made all those announcements on Monday?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I am asking the Leader of the Opposition whether he agrees with the investments we are making, as a provincial government, in New Brunswick. Day after day, opposition members keep saying that they are against the capital budget, but, when it comes to files specifically related to their ridings, they want the money to be invested.

Do you agree, yes or no, with us making strategic investments based on the Asset Management System? Capital investments stimulate the economy and enable us to ensure that New Brunswickers have appropriate infrastructure. The budget was tabled in December, and, since then, several announcements have been made in New Brunswick, whether it be in Saint John, the Acadian Peninsula, the southeastern part of the province, or the Fredericton area. Throughout New Brunswick, investments are being made on behalf of New Brunswickers.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: It goes back to the fact that CRA is doing a poll this week. That is why the ministers have come out to make these announcements.

On Friday morning and afternoon during estimates, the Minister of Health was on his feet. He was talking about mental health at the end of Mental Health Week. Guess what! He never mentioned the location of the youth centre. When he was asked about that, he said that no decisions had been made. All of a sudden, on Monday morning, the decision had been made.



As we watch these government members continue to go into damage control and meltdown on their own, we start to see even some of the former Liberal Cabinet ministers come out and question some of their decision-making ability. We had the former provincial Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate, Bernard Richard, a former Liberal member and minister. He is hitting this government on its decision-making.

Can the minister tell those on the floor of the House whether this is strictly a political decision or whether there is some other reason that this decision was made?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: This decision was thought out. This decision is very clear.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: It is based on a lot of information on what has occurred over the last number of years. A report was published by Bernard Richard and Shirley Smallwood in 2011, and, since then, a lot of things have changed and a lot of things have happened.

What I find interesting is to hear the Leader of the Opposition get up and question the location of the centre when, a few weeks ago, I had a conversation with the person sitting right next to him, the MLA for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre. She is a former Minister of Health and a former Minister of Social Development who started this process under the former government. I asked her opinion, and she said that Campbellton is the right place to put this centre. Maybe the opposition members should be consulting among themselves before they raise these issues on the floor of the Legislature.

Mr. Fitch: Once again, the members across the floor are clapping over the fact that the minister across the way has taken words and twisted them around. The fact of the matter is that, the other day, he said: No decision has been made. That is the disrespect those members are showing for estimates. They are not answering the questions. They are not giving the information to the people who want to know this information.

That is why Bernard Richard has come out and questioned him. That is whom I was talking about when I talked about this particular location and how it was decided upon. Bernard Richard, a former Liberal Cabinet minister, who used to support the party, is asking the government: Is this just a political decision, or what are the criteria behind the making of this decision?

I am giving the members of this government an opportunity to redeem themselves. I have given them that opportunity many times. They could reverse the asset grab for seniors, and, now, they can explain to the people why they have made this decision. There are even Liberal Cabinet ministers hitting them on this particular topic.



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Once again, I am curious as to why the former Minister of Health and former Minister of Social Development is not asking me these questions. A few weeks ago, we had a conversation right over here, and I asked her opinion, because we were considering the two sites. There are arguments for Moncton. There are arguments for Campbellton. I asked her for her opinion, and she was very clear. She stated categorically that Campbellton is where the centre should be. That was not the only reason on which we based our decision, but I think the Leader of the Opposition needs to come clean on that particular issue.

There has been a lot of evidence brought forward, and this project has shifted somewhat from when it started to where we are today, for different circumstances. Initially, this facility was supposed to be a community-based, private sector facility. The former government decided that it should be part of government, and we are following through on that. Within the health care system, the recommendation was that the centre be in Campbellton.

Mr. Fitch: It is pretty rich that the member opposite, the member for Shediac—Cap-Pelé, is saying: Come clean. Why do you not come clean on the Atcon scandal? You have an opportunity to do that. It is clear that the Atcon Six have control of a small Cabinet and that it is the Atcon Six who are making the decisions here.

We have had people saying all along that this is a political decision, so I am going to give the government an opportunity here today to clear the air with the public. Table the evaluation you have done. Table the evaluation of the three locations that were mentioned—Campbellton, Fredericton, and Moncton. Table the economic impact of all three locations. Let the people see clearly why the decision to put the centre in Campbellton was not political but was based on fact, based on criteria, and based on a really independent evaluation of this important, important youth mental health issue.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, I am going to repeat my answer to be sure that the opposition members understand the situation. At one point, that centre was supposed to be built by a third party, the private sector, but it was determined that privacy laws would not allow things to proceed this way. The former government decided that this institution should be built by the government. Our government followed through on this, and the responsibility rests with the Department of Health. The department met with the directors of both health networks, Horizon and Vitalité, and it was agreed that the Vitalité Health Network should be responsible for this project. When Vitalité did its analysis and had a choice between Moncton and Campbellton, the recommendation was in favour of Campbellton, given the expertise and resources that already exist in that region, the vision being to develop a network of expertise there.

Day Care

Ms. Dubé: We know that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development had a meeting today with day care operators about the \$2.4-million cut to their budget. With regard to



this meeting, you said that you were going to listen to them. So, did you understand clearly, and are you going to revisit your decision?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I am glad to see that the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre is in the House today. I would like her to ask me a question on the mental health facility because what she told me and what her leader says on the floor of this House are two totally different things. The same thing happens with the member for Moncton Northwest. He says one thing in private to the minister and then gets up and says something totally different in this House. It is about time that the members of the opposition got their stories straight.

The same thing applies to infrastructure. The members opposite get up in this House every single day and say that we are investing too much in infrastructure but then ask for all these different infrastructure projects around the province. They do the same thing with our budget reduction initiatives. They get up on the floor of this House every day and criticize every single one, yet they claim that they had a plan to balance the books. Let's hear their plan. Let's hear their position.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Dubé: I will give the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development a second chance. We are very clearly against the decision to take \$2.4 million out of the pockets of private day care operators, these women entrepreneurs from across the province.

At one time, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development said that he had met with day care operators but was standing by his position; he had said that his position was firm. Last week, the minister said that he would be meeting with these people again.

I will repeat my question again for the minister: Did he listen carefully, but, most importantly, did he fully understand the plight of these people? Following that meeting, is he prepared to go back on his decision to take \$2.4 million out of the pockets of women entrepreneurs who operate day cares throughout the province?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I can indeed confirm to the House that I had the opportunity this morning to meet with representatives of for-profit day care owners to talk, obviously, about the Quality Improvement Funding Support Program, and I can also confirm that we will be continuing the dialogue.

As agreed, the people with whom I met provided me with more information with respect to the day care situation. I want to point out that we had anticipated that they would provide me with



new data. As promised, after receiving it, I will take the time to review this information. We agreed that I would get back to them later with my reaction. At this time, no other meetings are planned, but we committed to further discussions about the information I was provided with today.

I want to remind you that this discussion was very productive, frank, and open, so we will continue to move in that direction.

Ms. Dubé: The minister is still talking about for-profit businesses. The goal of these meetings... The opposition rises in this House every day to make the minister understand that private day cares in New Brunswick are not for-profit businesses. These women who operate these businesses came to us last week to defend their point of view once again. There were two meetings, and the minister is still talking about for-profit businesses.

In our opinion, these are private day cares that are not making a profit. However, the owners of these businesses care about early childhood development and are asking the minister to go back on his decision to take \$2.4 million out of the pockets of day care operators.

You have had two meetings with these people, and now you have data; was your goal simply to meet with them to be able to say that you did? No further meetings are planned to give these people a final decision. I am giving you a chance to tell us whether you are considering the possibility of rethinking your position and giving the \$2.4 million back to these people.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As I said, we had the opportunity to have frank and sincere discussions. This morning, these people provided me with new data to which they feel I must pay special attention.

I want to point out to the member opposite that we actually do have for-profit day cares. There are indeed nonprofit day cares; there are community day cares.

[Original]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: In this case, we are talking about for-profit day cares; so, they have an



opportunity to make a profit. I think you need to take a good look at the existing definitions before trying to lecture me, as the opposition seems to be doing today.

That being said, I will remind you that we have invested \$400 000 in this program. We will continue to invest, and we are proud of our investments in early childhood.

[Original]

Assessments

Mr. B. Macdonald: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. It is the time of year when people receive their property tax bills. This year, a number of my constituents have noticed significant increases, particularly around the area of Yoho Lake and other areas.

In estimates, the minister revealed that he has eliminated one person from the property tax assessment branch. It is a small branch. One person could have a big impact. I am wondering whether the minister will now tell the House: Who is this person who was eliminated? What did that person do? How much was saved by eliminating that person?

Hon. Mr. Doherty: Thank you very much for the question. As you know, the *Assessment Act* requires that real properties be assessed in January of each and every year, at the true and real value. Following that assessment, a base is created. Following the creation of the base, it is referred to Environment and Local Government and eventually off to the municipalities, where the final assessment rate is given.

Mr. B. Macdonald: The minister has given us a vision of the Act and the process, but he has not answered my question. My question pertains to the changes that he has made to the staff within his branch. Will he now tell the House who has been eliminated, what that person's position was, what that person was doing, and how much was saved by that elimination?

Hon. Mr. Doherty: Thank you very much for the question. As you know, this is Innovation Week. We have made wonderful changes in terms of the assessments. Assessments will now be done via telemetry or satellites. This will provide more accurate and more frequent assessments so that, in fact, we do not get these spikes.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Thank you. I am going to give the minister one more chance to answer my basic question. I am concerned that he is moving to a more automated system, which is why I am asking this today. He has made a change to his branch. He has eliminated a position. I would like to know which position that was, what the person was doing, and what was saved by eliminating him or her.

Hon. Mr. Doherty: Thank you very much once again for the question. We were elected on being fiscally responsible as a government, and this is what we are doing by using technology.



I also would like to remind you that we have been in government for over 200 days. It has been an exciting time. We have created 2 500 jobs. We have developed a Youth Employment Strategy. We have worked on literacy. We have worked on parental contributions for students. We are funding mental health with the announcement here today. We are working against violence against women. We have increased the minimum wage. Yes, watch out for the next 200 days.

Government Loans

Mr. K. MacDonald: There are still plenty of questions swirling around the sale of Co-op Atlantic. We do not know how many jobs will be lost in our province. We do not know the impact this will have on our New Brunswick farmers, and we do not know the impact it will have on the New Brunswick taxpayer. My question today is around the impact on that New Brunswick taxpayer. Can the minister advise the House as to how this sale impacts any loans that may be outstanding from the province of New Brunswick to Co-op Atlantic?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I appreciate the question from my critic. As a government, we certainly recognize the importance of the co-op in New Brunswick and in our small communities in Atlantic Canada. We are well aware of the ongoing issues with Co-op Atlantic. It is presently going through the process of reaching out to its board members along with all the members on a vote that will be taking place to divest itself of the retail and gas operations.

We are very well aware of that, and we understand the impact that it could possibly have on agriculture in New Brunswick and in Atlantic Canada, for that matter. We would like to work with it, but, at the same time, we understand some of the ongoing concerns that the co-op has presently with the province. We are presently working with it.

Mr. K. MacDonald: We on this side of the House are not sure that the minister does understand the economic impact it will have on our farmers because we do not believe that that economic impact study has actually been undertaken. What the Liberals on that side of the House do understand is how to give up security on a loan at taxpayer expense. That was why more than \$70 million in New Brunswick taxpayers' money—hard-earned New Brunswick taxpayers' money—ended up going to the Deh Cho Bridge in the Northwest Territories in the Atcon scandal.

My question is this: Has our position as a province, as a creditor, been changed to accommodate the sale of Co-op Atlantic? It is a very simple question: Has our position as a creditor changed?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I thank the member opposite for the question. We are very well aware of the situation at Co-op Atlantic, and we continue to work with Co-op Atlantic. We understand the importance that it brings forward in our communities, not only the communities of New Brunswick, but also all the communities of Atlantic Canada, and the impact that it has in the agriculture sector.

It is so vitally important that we diversify our economy. We should spend our time creating jobs in other sectors so that we are not relying on one single source. Great news today in Caraquet, in



Bas-Caraquet—80 new jobs in the shipbuilding business. Can you imagine the possibilities of a \$25-billion contract that is going on in Halifax right now and the possibilities that we could tie in to some of that? There are great opportunities for Bas-Caraquet and great opportunities for the Acadian Peninsula. Those are things that we, as a government, have to work on as we go forward.

I am just wondering whether the opposition members want those things or not. I would like for them to tell us.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. K. MacDonald: What we on this side of the House want to know and understand is how this government evaluates what is a go-forward plan for a job. There is \$49 350 per job in Bas-Caraquet and \$9 117 per job in St. Stephen. We do not understand the criteria, and this minister will not provide that criteria here in the House.

The members of this government, particularly the Atcon Six, have a reputation for wasting taxpayer money as though it is an Olympic event. They are going for the gold. Liberal mismanagement, as I said before, cost \$70 million with the Atcon scandal.

Will the taxpayers of New Brunswick lose any money as a result of the sale of Co-op Atlantic?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I thank the member opposite. On this side of the House, we are very well aware of the history and the relationship that Co-op has had in Atlantic Canada, and we will continue to work with it.

At the same time, we are going to continue creating jobs and creating the right opportunities for people to create jobs. I hope those members are in agreement with having the barge terminal in Saint John. There is another opportunity. There is a cluster opportunity. It is a tremendous opportunity for a business cluster to grow in Saint John to diversify the economy in the industrial park sector.

Also, Advanced Heli Core was announced just a couple of weeks ago. It is going to be manufacturing oil rigs that can be transported by helicopter and can operate year-round in the Alberta climate. There are opportunities right here in New Brunswick. The owner of the company, Robin Fournier, stated: "I have chosen New Brunswick because I know the community".

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Collective Bargaining

Mr. Jody Carr: CUPE 2745, which represents educational support workers, educational assistants among them, and other school district office administrative support, has been without a contract for months. Those people are now ready to go back to the table to negotiate. However, the



government has cancelled the upcoming meetings because of an apparent lack of knowledge of where it is going with these negotiations. We want some clarity.

CUPE 2745 representatives are in the gallery this afternoon. They are often here in the Legislature, participating. Could the government answer as to why these meetings have been cancelled? Is it because the government is unsure of what to do next?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: In response to the question, let me say that we are negotiating with 24 different groups across the province, representing 45 654 employees, if I remember correctly. We have had meetings with various unions, and those meetings will continue.

So far, there has been great cooperation on both sides between the unions and our government. I must say that, under our current mandate, we have to approach 23 of the 24 groups with which we have to negotiate. That is what we will continue to do in terms of trying to ensure that these people are well represented and properly paid and that, at the end of the day, we, as a government, have a good chance of negotiating with those people.

Usually, negotiations are not conducted in the House nor in the papers, but around a table. Getting back to what the member opposite said, if the unions have any problems with the department or with me, they can just call me.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Jody Carr: CUPE 2745 represents educational assistants and educational support workers. The vast majority of them work with the most vulnerable students in our education system, and they have gone quite some time without a contract.

In addition to that, this government has been in office for more than six months. Members in my constituency have been told that the meetings have been cancelled because the government does not know what its mandate is in terms of meeting its mandate envelope with which it can go into negotiations. Is it acceptable that six months have passed and the government is not aware of what its negotiation mandate is? Is it a case of the Premier and Cabinet not giving the Minister of Human Resources a mandate envelope to negotiate properly and openly with CUPE 2745 or with all the unions, for that matter?

This is an opportunity for the minister to provide clarity on this issue. Our educational support workers are very important, and they work with very vulnerable students.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.



Hon. Mr. Gallant: First of all, we have to clarify something. The member opposite who asked the question was in government for four years, and we cannot tell you how many people did not have a contract under the previous government, including the correctional officers. We were able to do that within months because of the work of the minister.

We have been in office for six months. We ask unions to be patient. We are going to make sure that we have a good dialogue with them on how we are going to move forward, providing strong services for New Brunswickers and respecting our fiscal obligations and responsibilities. I ask them to be patient, and they will certainly hear from us soon.

However, I have to say that, day after day in the Legislature, we hear the opposition members talking as though everything would have been fixed had they had two more weeks in government. Let's remind people what it was like under the previous government. There were no jobs created. There were no balanced books despite the promise to do so. The deficit reduction strategy was not met, and there was certainly no plan to get our province back on track.

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

