

May 15, 2015

[Original]

Corporate Research Associates

Mr. Fitch: We all know that CRA, Corporate Research Associates, polls Atlantic Canadians every quarter on issues such as politics, the economy, and any relative social issues and a lot of the information is given to subscribers in the form of a report. Subscribers can ask questions of their own, if they wish. I wonder whether the Premier could elaborate on what services he is receiving from Corporate Research Associates.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Personally, I do not receive any services from this company. It is incredibly strange to hear what the opposition is telling us today.

[Original]

I cannot see how the Legislature should be used to talk about CRA. We, as a province, have some pretty important challenges to face. We are focused on creating jobs, and we are focused on making sure that we get our finances in order in a way that will allow us to provide strong social programs—health care, seniors' care, day care, education, and many others—for many years to come.

Unfortunately, we have the opposition members fearmongering. They are doing it again today, and they did it yesterday.

[Translation]

Yesterday, the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre said that, when New Brunswickers retire, the government is going to take their money. It is unbelievable to hear opposition members say such things.

[Original]

We know that our policy is progressive. It is one that will actually put money in the pockets of those who need it the most when it comes to senior care, and we are proud of that.

Mr. Fitch: Maybe the Premier took the question personally when I said that he was receiving this service. I will rephrase it, and I will give the Premier a chance to rethink his answer a little. Is the Premier, the Premier's Office, the Executive Office... Are any of the offices or areas that he is involved in receiving services from Corporate Research Associates?



Hon. Mr. Gallant: Not to my knowledge, but I will say that the member opposite just named many departments. He can certainly do an RTI, I am sure, and get information regarding this, but it is not to my knowledge and certainly not because I directed it. If it is happening within the government, it is not to my knowledge.

Again, I am baffled by the questions of the opposition members. I do not understand why they spend day after day trying to fearmonger and trying to tell New Brunswickers that bad things are happening when we are working very hard to tackle our challenges. They did the same thing when it came to the rule changes for the Legislature. They fearmongered day after day, saying that the sky was going to fall and that democracy was being attacked with our rule changes. All that has happened is that we are actually more efficient and more transparent as a Legislature. People know exactly when question period is, and we have our condolence and congratulatory messages at the end of the day. Yet, they fearmongered, as they have done on every single policy and every decision that we have made in government so far.

Mr. Fitch: Maybe I will help the Premier out with a specific date. Through the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, I have an email that said that the Premier had a meeting on January 20 with Don Mills, who is associated with Corporate Research Associates. The email says that, as a subscriber, you get the following—quarterly reports, access to the surveys at a reduced rate, access to over 25 years' worth of data, Web and on-demand presentations by Don Mills or Margaret Brigley on the state of the region, and in-person presentations as needed.

Therefore, according to this email, on January 20, the Premier and his caucus had a meeting with Don Mills. Would the Premier like to rephrase his question before we go on today and give us the answer as to whether he or the ECO is receiving research from Don Mills and CRA?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The answer is still the same: Not to my knowledge. At one point, Don Mills did indeed come to see us, but I was not available to meet with him at the time. I cannot remember if this was the time you are talking about; however, I can tell you that I sometimes meet with Don Mills. I saw him a few months ago, I think. I do not really remember where it was. Frankly, I really do not understand why this bothers the opposition.

[*Original*]

I really do not understand what the opposition is doing. I think the opposition members miss being in government so much that they want to be part of our communications team, they want to be part of our scheduling team, and they want to be part of our correspondence team. Meanwhile, while they are focused on PR and who is in the photo ops and who got invited to announcements, we are going to be focused on creating jobs for New Brunswickers. As my colleague from Charlotte County said, we are doing a good job so far. The economy has produced 2 500 jobs since we were sworn in as government, and we will continue the momentum.



Mr. Fitch: Once again, I have an email here that is different from the story that the Premier is telling.

I will tell you why this is important, and it goes back to... Yes, we would be making different decisions than this government, and we would not be taking assets from seniors, as this government is doing. It does go back to the activities of this week. For the last six months, we have seen hardly any announcements on jobs or capital projects, and, all of a sudden, this week, we have seen over \$100 million in announcements—and the week is not over yet.

We know that CRA goes into the field and calls people, asking: What do you think of the job that the government is doing? We are seeing that, in the past little while, the gallery has been filled with people who are ashamed of the government and who are saying that it should reverse some of the decisions that it made because the decisions hurt seniors, day care operators, and students.

Again, will the Premier admit that he is getting advice from Don Mills and CRA to be out in the field today?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will not admit that because it is certainly not the case. I cannot even remember the last time I spoke to Don Mills. I am baffled that the opposition wants to take its questions on the floor of the Legislature to try to discredit Don Mills. I just do not get it.

Meanwhile, we are focused on creating jobs, which we think is the priority for New Brunswickers. We are focused on getting our finances in order in a progressive manner. Despite that, we have the opposition members fearmongering when they know it is a good policy—they know it. The member for Moncton Northwest said it to our minister, that it is a good policy. He did not ask any questions during estimates. I would assume that it is because he thinks it is good policy, so why will he not tell his colleagues that we are making the right decisions, getting our finances in the right spot, and focusing on the right things like creating jobs and ensuring a progressive province that will deliver a strong social fabric for all its citizens?

Mr. Fitch: There is nothing progressive about what the Premier is doing to seniors, students, and many others. We have seen the gallery filled in the last little bit with seniors, with students, with farmers, with CUPE, and with day care operators. This Premier is making decisions that are tearing this province apart. That is why, if we were making decisions on that side, we would be doing a better job. I know that for a fact.

When the Premier filled the calendar with announcements here this week, it was to balance the negative impact of the decisions that this government has made in the last seven months of its mandate. We see issues that come over and over and over and the same type of decision-making.



Has the Premier been told how much the broken promise to the seniors and the asset grab from the seniors is worth in popularity in the polls? The announcements to date—will they counteract? What is it going to cost him in popularity, this asset grab from the seniors?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is a slow day today. First off, no, I have not talked to Don Mills in quite some time. I cannot remember the last time I spoke to him, but I do know him and see him at events from time to time.

Those members are saying that we are not being progressive. In fact, we are being very progressive. We are giving more money to the seniors who need it the most—more money in their pockets. We are also taxing the wealthiest. The 1% wealthiest among us will be asked to pay a little bit more—an incredibly progressive policy.

On top of that, we raised the minimum wage. That is very progressive. It helps those who are trying to make ends meet. People are working hard—good, honest people—trying to make a living and to have a high quality of life. We helped them a bit by raising the minimum wage.

What is baffling, again, is that the opposition opposes us taxing the wealthiest, opposes us putting more money in the pockets of seniors—those who need it the most—and opposes us raising the minimum wage.

Mr. Fitch: It is the people of New Brunswick who oppose the decisions that this government is making. It is the opposition that is giving those people a voice in the Legislature of New Brunswick. That is to whom we are giving a voice.

Again, we look at some of the decisions that this government has made and we look at what the results have been. They have filled the gallery with seniors, day care operators, and students. These are some of the most vulnerable in the province.

I would ask the Premier this. In the email that we received under the right to information Act... If the government is so transparent and forward, why did we have to make a right to information request to get this information? The email said that the Premier and the caucus had a meeting on January 20. If the Premier cannot remember, why does he not take the time to ask some of his caucus members whether they remember having a meeting on January 20?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Indeed, I specifically answered this question. I said that the Leader of the Opposition is talking about the day when Mr. Mills came, but that I was not present. I do not know what else to tell you. We can meet afterwards to talk about my schedule, communications plans, or who will be in the photos when we make announcements, if things like that are a concern for the Leader of the Opposition.



[Original]

Unfortunately, I think the real focus of the opposition members is themselves. All we have heard them say is that they are going to clean up the mess and that they have a right to govern in New Brunswick. We heard the Leader of the Opposition say: We can do it better. We also heard them say that they are going to clean up everything and they are the voice of New Brunswickers.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: When you are elected and have the privilege to sit in these seats, you are not doing it for yourself. You are doing it for the people you represent. You are doing it for New Brunswickers.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: That is exactly what we on this side of the Legislature are doing. We are focusing on the priorities of creating jobs and giving a strong social fabric for all New Brunswickers.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Special Care Homes

Ms. Dubé: Now that we have more details regarding the government policy on seniors, we know that it will be reaching into seniors' pockets. So, my question is this: Are special care homes subject to this same government policy? Are these special care homes part of the Strategic Program Review?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is only nursing homes. It is written in our policy, black on white. We literally answered that question days and days and days ago.

It is insulting to the people of New Brunswick that the opposition will not take the time to read our policy. It is unfortunate for the future of our province that the opposition...

(Interjections.)



Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is not funny. It is not funny.

It is unfortunate that the opposition members will fearmonger and say things that our policy will not do. They will do that without even doing us, the government, or New Brunswickers the courtesy of reading the policy.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Had the member opposite read the policy, this question obviously would have been answered. I ask the members of the opposition to take their jobs seriously, to stop fearmongering, and to bring constructive ideas on how we are going to get our collective finances in order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Dubé: I think that the Premier is really going through a crisis. Yes, the opposition members are doing their homework and, yes, we are the voice of New Brunswickers, including seniors. I can also tell you that I asked the same question in the House a few weeks ago, and the Minister of Social Development told us that the special care home sector was part of the Strategic Program Review.

So, my question today for the Premier and the Liberal government is simply this: Will there really be a review of the special care home sector? Is it still being considered? After the next step, can we expect people in special care homes to come under the same policy as those in the nursing homes? The Premier is the one who needs to do his homework.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: If the opposition member wants to talk about the Strategic Program Review, I want to say that I am still waiting for her party's proposals. To date, the opposition has not made any suggestions when it comes to the Strategic Program Review. We have been talking about it for months, but, so far, the opposition members are just being critical of all initiatives, decisions, and considerations. That being said, they are not offering any alternatives. So, if the member wants to talk about the Strategic Program Review, perhaps she could give us some suggestions.

Ms. Dubé: We are making suggestions to you every day. We are also doing so publicly, in the House. Leave the seniors alone, and do not dig into their pockets. I cannot say it more publicly than I am doing right now. Does the minister accept that proposal? That is the question.

Again, the Minister of Social Development told us that the special care home sector was part of the Strategic Program Review. That seems to imply that the next step will be to ensure that people in special care homes will be subject to the same policy as those in the nursing homes.



My question is still the same, if the Premier wants to answer it. I do not know who can answer my question, but I am asking again for an answer. Are you considering the special care home sector as part of your Strategic Program Review, yes or no? I managed to get this information in the House from your government. Is that the next step?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: When we are talking about the Strategic Program Review, the opposition members stand up and tell us about areas where we cannot make any cuts. However, they never talk to us about areas where we can look for additional savings and resources. We need to balance the budget.

The former government and the former Minister of Finance, who failed to get the job done, promised during the 2010 election campaign that they had a plan to balance the New Brunswick budget without increasing taxes or cutting services. They increased all the taxes they could increase and eliminated all the programs they could eliminate, but they did not balance the budget. The former government told us that, if it had been in power for two more weeks, it would have managed to do that. The opposition members must have had a plan; what is it?

[Original]

Health Care System

Mr. Coon: The Chalmers hospital in Fredericton and, for that matter, hospitals around the province are bursting at the seams. They are in gridlock—so much so that surgeries are being cancelled, patients are trapped in ER hallways for days, and people are dying without dignity. They cannot be given private rooms because they are not available.

The chief of surgery at the Chalmers has taken to the airwaves. The chiefs of medical staff from many of our regional hospitals have taken to the newspapers. Hospitals are in gridlock, and short-term solutions need to be imposed now. Hospitals are housing seniors because nursing homes will not take them. Eighty percent of the costs of operating those nursing homes are paid by the people of this province—80%.

My question for the Minister of Social Development is this: Will she require existing nursing homes to take in seniors who are stuck in our hospitals to start to relieve some of this gridlock?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The entire preamble to the question had to do with hospitals. I am the Minister of Health, so I will take that question.

We have talked about this many times. I have been in the media a lot lately talking about this situation. The member, I am sure, has heard me talk about this before. The member and the opposition are making it sound as if this is a situation that has happened over the last six months. We have an aging population in New Brunswick, and we do have an alternate level of care bed situation in the province. This did not happen in the last six or seven months. This has been decades in the making. People do not go from being 45 to being 75 in six months.



We are working very closely to address these challenges. My colleague the Minister of Social Development and I, with our departments, are working nonstop to try to come up with some solutions—short-term, long-term, and...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: The minister is right. Of course, this problem has been building for a long time, and now, as a result, there is gridlock in our hospitals. The minister is part of the government that is in place now, and his responsibility is to start to relieve that gridlock now. We need short-term solutions.

During rounds at the Chalmers this week, Dr. Christie, the chief of ethics for the Horizon Health Network, made an interesting proposal. If, for every 12 beds that nursing homes are licensed to operate, nursing homes were required to take in one additional senior who is now stuck in a hospital, no seniors would be forced to live in hospitals. This would open up hospital beds and would be part of a short-term solution to relieve the gridlock in our acute care hospitals. It would provide far more suitable housing, even if it was a little crowded, for seniors in need of nursing care.

Will the minister use her powers under section 12 of the *Nursing Homes Act* to expand nursing home licenses to accommodate seniors who are stuck in hospitals...

Mr. Speaker: Time. Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, we do need to identify some short-, medium-, and long-term solutions, but building nursing homes, the last time I checked, took approximately 18 months. That would be in the long-term category. I believe that, in the short-term category, we need to look at home care. We need to look at the role our Extra-Mural Program plays. We need to make sure we are maximizing the resources we have on the ground, and we are doing that.

As part of the Strategic Program Review, there is a targeted initiative, a project under way, involving the Department of Social Development, the Department of Health, and the RHAs. We have had presentations from the New Brunswick Nursing Home Association. Other partners are going to be asked to play a role.

We realize that this is a challenge. We are asking people to give us the time to make sure we get it right. We do not want to rush to conclusions. This is a situation that has been decades in the making. What was done in the previous four years...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: In the short term, I was not talking about building new nursing homes. I was talking about requiring existing nursing homes to take extra seniors from hospitals into their existing buildings, adding a couple of extra beds. They would have to be licensed for that. Building new



nursing homes is something that is needed in the long term, but, in the short term, we have to resolve this crisis.

The chiefs of medical staff for the Chalmers hospital, the Saint John Regional Hospital, the Moncton Hospital, the Upper River Valley Hospital, and the Miramichi Hospital have written to both the Minister of Social Development and the Minister of Health to propose a series of short-term solutions to break the gridlock in our hospitals. Will the Minister of Social Development commit to meeting with them and—together—her colleague the Minister of Health?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I have been saying that, yes, we are working on those initiatives. There is one thing that the doctors have failed to point out, unfortunately. Their letter did have a lot of good suggestions, but those suggestions amount to tens of millions of dollars. We need to make sure that we are able to pay for this. I have not yet heard from the member opposite how he would suggest that we pay for these additional services. They are possible solutions, but we need to identify how we are going to pay for them.

This is a situation that needs to be dealt with. It is a situation our government is committed to dealing with. We are looking at bringing all the partners together. We need to have dialogue to make sure that the entire continuum of care, from home care to special care homes to nursing homes to hospitals to palliative care services, is properly planned and properly resourced. That does not happen overnight, but we are working diligently at that.

Larry's Gulch

Mr. Flemming: Yesterday, I asked a simple, basic little question, and I did not get anything that remotely answered the subject matter. Being the sometimes persistent fellow that I am, I will ask the same question again, and I will ask it to the same person, the Attorney General.

We have seen that, recently, there have been a number of investigations going on about this Larry's Gulch business. It seems to have taken quite a hold of the government. It seems to find this very interesting. I would simply like to know how many years are going to be investigated—4, 8, 12—and how much such investigation would cost. It is a simple question. I do not think there is very much to it.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I apologize in advance for taking this question, because I am not going to answer that one. I will leave it for the Attorney General. I had to get up because there is an important question that remains on the floor of the Legislature. This is very important for public policy. It is very important for the future of our province.

On January 20, I was in St. John's, Newfoundland, and I did not meet with Don Mills. I hope that helps to clarify the worry and helps to clarify the information that the opposition needs to help us create good public policy. I could not let question period go without clarifying that for the member opposite. It is clearly very important for the future of our province to create jobs, to get our finances in order, and to help families.



We must know when the Premier meets with Don Mills. It was not on January 20. I was actually meeting with the other Premiers of the Atlantic Provinces, discussing how we are going to create jobs, get our finances in order, and help families in Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Flemming: I am a little confused, and you will help me out, Mr. Speaker. I do not know whether to re-ask my question or whether the Attorney General will simply get up. The Premier used up a minute or so of time, so I would ask the Attorney General to stand up and perhaps answer the question.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As members are well aware, in February, we received a report that clearly showed there was cause to look further into the issue regarding the publication of the guest list for Larry's Gulch Lodge, as well as the issue surrounding the use of this place. Following the usual practice, we made sure to pass on these questions to the Access to Information and Privacy Commissioner, who is reviewing the file pertaining to publication of the lists. I am sure the members fully understand the importance of ensuring compliance with the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* with regard to the allegations that were made.

A second point had also been raised, and that is the whole issue of what use should be made of this place, which might—and I emphasize “might”, because these are allegations—have been used for purposes other than those for which Larry's Gulch Lodge is intended. I want to make sure that this work will get done.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Flemming: Thank you, Mr. Attorney General, for your answer. I find it very enlightening that the government received a report. The report suggested the need for further investigation, and such investigation has been ordered by the government. Is that the Auditor General's report that you are referring to? You could just as easily have referred to the Auditor General's report on Atcon, because if you use the same words—they received a report, the report recommended further investigation, the government followed the report and is, in fact, doing that... If that logic applies for a canoe ride, a couple of dinners, and a few flies, why would that logic not follow with the vaporization of \$75 million?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Following the same logic as the opposition member used in his comments, you will understand that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has already considered the issue you are talking about. The Auditor General has already considered it as well and made recommendations, and the follow-up work is being done. Well, that is not comparable to the situation with Larry's Gulch Lodge, where we tried to see whether there was a problem. There



seemed to be one, so we referred the two issues that were raised, first of all, to the Access to Information and Privacy Commissioner, and, now, to a former RCMP officer, who is investigating to see whether there is indeed a problem. In the case the member opposite is referring to, studies have been done, and we are following up on the recommendations.

[Original]

Mactaquac Provincial Park

Mr. Urquhart: The people of New Brunswick are beginning to feel that the government cares very little about tourism or about our students in the Fredericton and greater central area. Mactaquac Park opens this weekend. Tourism was advised in January that there would be no one to run the canteen or convenience store within the park.

Is this deliberate, to get rid of the park? Is this the government's way of telling students that it is cutting student employment in other parks of the province? Is it just bad management? We want to know: Will the Department of Tourism have staff on-site? The park opens in a couple of hours. It was yesterday that the contract closed. Why has nobody looked after it or been awarded it?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I want to say that we are very proud of our parks in the province and we are extremely happy to invite all New Brunswickers to visit all our parks in our beautiful province, including Mactaquac Park, which will be open later today. Staff will be on-site. The park will be in operation.

The member opposite is welcome to go there as well. If you want a pass, member, I will get you a pass so that you can go tour the park. I have been there many times in the past few months. It is a beautiful park. The sun is shining, and it is going to be a beautiful summer. I encourage all New Brunswickers to get out, visit our parks, and bring their families, including you.

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

