

May 28, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: Today, published in the media, Fred Hazel said:

Since its election, the Liberal government of New Brunswick has come out with a series of seemingly ad hoc policies which are baffling the public... we've learned they have actually spent \$30,000 of taxpayers' money for some clarifying ads on nursing home care, but uncertainties remain.

We are aware of significant protests coming to the lawn of the Legislature this afternoon. It seems as though there have been a record number of protests on the lawn and in the gallery for a first-term government. Maybe this protest today will be as big as the NB Power protest that occurred when the last Liberal Premier tried to sell NB Power to Hydro-Québec. The people said no.

I am going to give the Premier a little opportunity to save some of his credibility. Will he be going out to address the people who are coming to the lawn of the Legislature this afternoon to tell them that some of his ad hoc policies are hurting them dramatically?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Our government is certainly prepared to meet with people. If some people come to the Legislative Assembly today to participate in a protest, this will of course be an opportunity for our government to meet with them and listen to them in order to understand their concerns. We will also be able to explain to them why we are making these decisions.

[Original]

I want to make it very clear that the decisions that we, as a province, have to make are not easy. It would have been easy for us to get into government and just let the status quo continue, but the status quo is not going to lead us to the province and the New Brunswick that we all want—one that is the best place to raise a family and one where there are opportunities for all our families.

[Translation]

We also want to have a province with its fiscal house in order, which will enable it to fund high-quality social programs like health care and education, and to provide support services to youth, vulnerable people, seniors, and everyone else who needs help, for decades to come.



[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: Again, I am giving the Premier this advice at our own peril, at the peril of the province of New Brunswick too, because, if I just left it alone, this government would crash and burn. It would become a one-turn government, and we would move back into the seats of the government and start making the right decisions for the people of the province.

I challenge the member for Miramichi Bay-Neguac to go out on the lawn of the Legislature and read her statement with the same gusto that she did today. I would suggest that she will probably not get through it and that she will be booed and heckled out of the protest.

Mr. Premier, here is how you can save your credibility, save your government, and save the people of New Brunswick a significant amount of worry because of your ad hoc, not-thought-out policies. Will you go out, apologize to the seniors today, and tell them that you will reverse this asset grab—it amounts to only \$1.6 million this year—that they can rest easy, that their assets are safe, and that the government is really looking after their best interests?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The seniors of our province can rest easy, knowing that we are going to make difficult choices in the fairest, most progressive way possible. The only reason, I would argue, that many seniors were concerned—and maybe some are still concerned—is that the opposition members are trying to fearmonger.

We have a policy that is progressive. It is one that asks those who have a bit more to contribute a bit more, but also, it puts more money in the pockets of those who need it. That has not yet been acknowledged by the Leader of the Opposition. The couples who have an income of \$60 000 or less per year will have more money in their pockets. The Leader of the Opposition has not even recognized or acknowledged yet that this is a part of the policy. Once he does that, I would ask him: Is he against that? Is he against giving those who need a bit more money the support that they need? We certainly are not. We are going to be progressive, and we are going to get the job done.

Mr. Fitch: Again, apparently, the Premier has no answers today, because he is now asking questions.

Norbert Cunningham wrote this today regarding the Premier's commentary that was published on Tuesday: "is just the latest of a blizzard of equally vapid, uninformative, self-congratulatory government pieces over the past few weeks. These have been so dreadful and lacking in substance it's embarrassing—or should be." That is what is written in Norbert Cunningham's article today in the *Times & Transcript*.

Again, the Premier is getting this information. He is getting a review of his performance so far. He has an opportunity today to turn it around. He could be part of the "turn-it-around awards" if he



goes out today, apologizes to the seniors, and tells them that the government is going to reexamine this policy, right from the start, and do the consultation that the government said it would do and tell them that, again, this is an opportunity to turn it around. Will the Premier go out and tell the people? That is what they want to hear.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Government members will be very happy to go talk to New Brunswickers in order to explain our position and our decisions to them, as well as the principles that guide them, and, of course, in order to listen to their concerns, questions, and suggestions.

[*Original*]

Since the member opposite is taking the time to read columnists, to read people who are obviously very opinionated, I am going to take the time to read something that I think is quite credible as well. This is from the Conference Board of Canada. It was released today. I quote: "The economy of New Brunswick is starting to look brighter." Another quote: "Overall, real GDP is expected to advance by 2.3 per cent this year and 2.6 per cent in 2016." We are focused on growing the economy, we are focused on creating jobs, and we are going to get our finances in order by making progressive policies. The opposition is just confused as to how we can make all this happen.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: The future is brighter because we are one day closer to taking over the government. That is what makes the future brighter. Thank you very much.

I would suggest to the Premier that he read all the reports and not be so selective. Denis Robichaud from CFIB said that the trend that was high in December when the Premier was holding out so much hope has been in a steady decline month after month, from 65 down to 58. He should also look at the Web site, and he should also look at Radio-Canada, which talks about a significant decline in the GDP and in growth here in New Brunswick.

There are lots of questions that the people of the province want to ask of the Premier. He is not making it any better, but, again, we will continue to hold the feet of the Premier and the government to the fire. Will he go out today and tell the people what they want to hear, which is that he is going to fire the Minister of Social Development and get back to basics?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Our ministers are working very hard, including the Minister of Social Development. It is clearly not easy to ask New Brunswickers to pay a little more or to get a little



less, but, again, we are making these changes in a progressive way.

[Original]

That includes the decisions made by the Minister of Social Development and our entire team, and we are going to continue to have progressive policies moving forward.

However, to go to the point of the Leader of the Opposition, that is not what the Conference Board of Canada says. It does not say: “The economy of New Brunswick is starting to look brighter” because the Conservatives are going to be in power. It does not say that. What it does say is that, under our policies, the economy of New Brunswick is doing better.

Under the watch of the previous government, in which the member opposite was a minister, we actually had a retraction in the GDP. Under our watch, we have real GDP that is projected to go up by 2.3% and 2.6% over the next two years. Those are results. That is the priority of New Brunswickers, and it is our priority as well.

Mental Health

Ms. Dubé: Yesterday, the coroner’s inquest into Serena Perry’s death called for the implementation of community treatment order legislation. The head of the New Brunswick Psychiatric Association is calling on the government to move forward with its election commitment to create community treatment orders. This will be a program to provide treatment for the mentally ill outside a hospital setting. The coroner’s inquest jury recommended that CTO legislation be called Serena’s Law. Will the minister inform the House on the progress that has been made on this particular election promise?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The member opposite knows or, at least, should know, if she took the time to read our platform, that having community treatment orders is a commitment that we made. We are not even finished Year 1 of a four-year mandate. That being said, obviously, not all platform commitments have been acted on as of yet. This is one that we are certainly going to be looking at, making sure that we do the proper consultation with the various stakeholders that need to be involved. However, it is a commitment of our government, and it is something with which we certainly intend on following through.

Ms. Dubé: We understand the amount of consultation and planning that will be required to ensure that this community treatment program is effective and sustainable. We understand that a great deal of input will be needed from experts in this field. We also understand that there are successful community treatment programs in place in other provinces that can be examined for best practices. We understand, as well, that a project of this sort needs a person to take the lead. Can the minister advise the House whether a team has been established to start this work and whether a team leader has been put in place in the department?



[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Last week, as part of the Strategic Program Review, we held a two-day session in which various stakeholders from across the province took part, and I would like to note that this issue was in fact brought up under the health component. If the opposition member had bothered to participate in this Strategic Program Review forum instead of making a mockery of it as opposition members have been doing since the beginning, she would have found that it is a subject many stakeholders are interested in.

We are interested in the matter the member is talking about, and we have made a commitment with regard to this initiative, so we are going to begin work on this file. As I have already said, there are 24 commitments in our campaign platform for which I am responsible, as Minister of Health. These files are moving forward at different rates, but we are certainly going to keep our promise.

Ms. Dubé: If I had received an invitation, I would probably have taken part in this session, since it is an extremely sensitive and important file, after all, and we must make sure this kind of situation does not happen in our institutions and government buildings.

In this House, we recently saw the government repeal the Act calling on political parties to determine the cost of their election promises. I would like to ask the current minister what the projected cost was for implementing such measures.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I am not going to let the member get off that easily with her preamble. We have been talking about the Strategic Program Review for the last eight months. It has been very well known, very well documented, and very well recorded that we had a two-day forum. The opposition member, the member for Fredericton South, was there and participated. For them to pretend that they did not know this was happening is certainly not very accurate.

What they have chosen to do has been to make a mockery of the consultations that we have been doing with the public. We have engaged the public every step of the way through our Strategic Program Review. We want to hear from New Brunswickers as to what their priorities are, to help us balance the books so that we can continue to focus on our three priorities as a government—job creation and economic development, righting the fiscal ship, and providing good programs and services to families. Unfortunately, the opposition has chosen not to participate in this initiative.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Energy Policy

Mr. Stewart: We are glad to see the government starting to talk about renewable energy with Bill 42, since this should eventually lead to some details pertaining to small-scale electricity generation in our province. Of course, as with anything this government announces, details will come later, once the government gets around to figuring them out, as it makes the regulations.

As always with this minister, our concern will be how much he interferes in this government's mandate. Through the process, we have seen multiple situations already where this minister has reverted to his Atcon days and reversed NB Power management decisions or ignored expert advice. My question is this: Will the regulations clearly state that NB Power has full control over the RFP process and that the minister or Cabinet will have no role whatsoever in the RFP process for small-scale generation?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: Thank you for that question. I listened to the member statement this morning on this legislation. I listened to all the members yesterday on second reading. It is pretty appalling to shoot down this piece of legislation. Why is it that every time we are talking—here, we are talking about a small-scale type of renewable energy project—about a community project by a nonprofit group or a First Nations group... Every time we talk about the little guy, the opposition continues to bash that. When we try to look at taxing the richest in New Brunswick, who protects them? Only the Tories. When we ask seniors to pay a little bit more to make sure that our nursing home system is more viable, who attacks those people? The Tories. When it comes to increasing minimum wage, who voted against it? They did. Every time we are there to defend the little guy, it is always the Tory opposition...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Stewart: No answer. That means that he will indeed interfere and ensure that Liberal friends are the main beneficiaries of this program. Of course, this minister is well known for his penchant for wasting taxpayers' dollars. Only two of his projects, Atcon and Blue Note, have cost the taxpayers of New Brunswick close to \$100 million, all provided to failing companies mere months before they went bankrupt. This is obviously a track record that begs for proper supervision of this minister. Regulations can do that.

We all know that renewable energy is generally priced at a premium in the market. As a result, NB Power ratepayers are the source of this subsidy to renewable developers. The worst thing a government can do is to provide additional subsidies to the developers or their local partners by using tax dollars through grants or loans to these investors because this forces the ratepayer to subsidize the project twice. Will the regulations clearly state that no project under this program will be able to access assistance from the province of New Brunswick or any economic development entities?



Hon. Mr. Arseneault: The member opposite wants to talk about wasting taxpayer dollars. We can talk about the \$1-billion cost overrun on Point Lepreau because the members opposite forgot to buy the proper insurance. They decided to convert Coleson Cove at a cost of over \$750 million, and that was a waste of taxpayers' money. They bought the old, rusty harbour bridge in Saint John that had more than \$150 million in future costs because they wanted to help their political friends. That was a waste of taxpayers' dollars. I can tell you where there is more waste—the whole Tory opposition.

When it comes to this legislation, we have a great working relationship with NB Power officials. The RFP tendering process for acceptance of these projects is done by NB Power, and it has the sole discretion to decide which small-scale renewable projects will go forward.

Mr. Stewart: Personal insults are very disturbing. No answer yet again indicates that this minister will once again start handing out taxpayers' dollars to companies in order to purchase more photo ops.

Perhaps the minister can provide an answer to a very easy question pertaining to Bill 42. The bill contains regulation-making authority pertaining to two or more small-scale generation facilities owned by two or more Aboriginal businesses and located on the same site. This, of course, is very specific authority being given to Cabinet. It is almost as though it were specifically designed for the Indian Island wind project. The fact that certain authority is being given to enable specific projects indicates that the minister is indeed picking projects before they go through the RFP process.

While he has yet again interfered in the process, will the minister at least assure the House today that no government money will be provided to the developer or any First Nations-owned partner involved in the Indian Island project, to ensure that New Brunswickers are not subsidizing this project twice?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: I am very proud to serve under this Premier of New Brunswick, who stands up for the little guy every time. I will repeat myself. When we reversed the property tax reduction that the members opposite gave to the Walmarts and the Costcos of the world, we protected the little guy, yet they kept hugging the big guys. When we tried to protect the consumers in terms of insurance files, whom did they hug? They hugged the insurance industry. They are continuously trying to be there for the big guys.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, members.

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: The Liberal Party continues to protect the little guys, and we will continue to do that. What is even more two-faced about this Tory opposition?

(Interjections.)



Hon. Mr. Arseneault: Sorry.

Most of the people on that side served during the previous mandate. If they had read the former minister's Energy Blueprint, they would know that this exact bill is one of the initiatives that they forgot to act on. Who is two-faced now?

Mr. Speaker: I am going to ask the Minister of Energy and Mines to retract immediately the statement "two-faced"—right now.

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: Sorry. I retract the statement "two-faced".

Advertising

Mr. B. Macdonald: The emerging Liberal advertisement scam is another Gallant broken promise. Let's look at the facts.

On page 36 of the 2014 Liberal platform, it is stated very clearly:

A Liberal government will make government more accountable by:

.....
Ending government-funded partisan advertising by adopting the Government Advertising Accountability Act.

The Premier introduced this bill just over a year ago. What did he say at the time? He said: "This bill will apply to any advertisement that the government of New Brunswick proposes to pay for". Those are the Premier's own words in Hansard.

What does the bill he introduced at that time have to say? Subsection 2(2) says: "The head of the government office shall give a copy of the advertisement to the Supervisor for review."

The question is simple. Did this government submit copies of the advertisements to the Supervisor of Political Financing for review?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The legislation was presented while we were in opposition because of the Alward government's misuse of taxpayers' money. The advertisement used the Premier. The Premier was sitting on his desk, telling everyone in New Brunswick that everything was okay, and it was paid for by the taxpayers of New Brunswick. That was a partisan advertisement. Other advertisements came out that were clearly pushing the agenda of the previous government. As an opposition, we felt that it was important to try to regulate the previous government.

When you look at our advertisements, they are about information. There is no video of me. It is information to tell people what our policies are. We think that is very important. We think that is



very good use of the taxpayers' money. In fact, if the legislation that we presented to try to protect New Brunswickers from the Alward government had been enacted, this ad would still pass. It would be informative. It is one that gives information to the people of New Brunswick, and we stand by what we are doing. We stand by our policies and by the ads that we did for information.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. B. Macdonald: It is always easy to regulate someone else and very difficult to regulate yourself. Now, this Premier feels the energy of absolute power coursing through his veins. It is very illuminating that he has not done what he said 12 months ago that he was going to do.

The reality is that he does not need the Act to do it. He could go today to the Supervisor of Political Financing and submit those ads for review, and it would be done. If his ads are so virtuous, I am sure the Supervisor of Political Financing will put a nice big rubber stamp on them so that the Premier can go forward with a clean conscience.

My question is this: Did the Premier submit the ads, as he promised a year ago that he would do? If he has not, will he do it today and get the supervisor's input?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, the ad was introduced to protect the taxpayers' money from the Alward government. There is no need for that when it comes to our ad. It is information-based. I find it very odd to see the member opposite get up and talk about ads. He was very, very keen, and he was okay with giving out handouts with his face on them with respect to the Hanwell Road construction. We have no lessons to learn from the member opposite.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have no lessons to learn from the opposition when it comes to making sure that our ads are nonpartisan and informative.

I am going to take some time to go to something that I said yesterday. The opposition tries to act as though the fiscal challenges that we have just came up overnight, since we have been in government, the last seven months. I promised I would do this, since the member opposite, the former Finance Minister, did not acknowledge this yesterday. I am going to start reading a few quotes.

From the budget speech in 2011-12: "a few major themes have been evident. One is that the province is facing a major fiscal challenge." I have many more quotes, and I cannot wait for the next question to go over them.



Mr. B. Macdonald: In his short time in government, this Premier's arrogance has been palpable. I will tell you, he is actually telling us that he is using up his time in question period with things that do not pertain to the question.

I have asked the Premier a very simple question. Did he submit his ad to the Supervisor of Political Financing, as he promised last year that he would do? Did he do that, and if he did not, will he do it today?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The member opposite does not seem to understand the bill that was introduced. It was introduced to provide accountability for the previous government.

[Translation]

It would have been good to include an accountability mechanism in the Act, and that is why we had asked the Supervisor of Political Financing to review it. What you are asking is not part of his current mandate; the bill had not been passed. That is the answer to the opposition member's question, even though he may not like it.

[Original]

So I am going to quote a few things again that I think are very pertinent to today's questions, and certainly to yesterday's questions.

The former Finance Minister, in 2012-13, during his budget speech, said: "our revenue is not enough to pay for all of the public services in the same manner as we currently provide them". From the budget speech in 2013-14: "There is no doubt that we are facing challenges in New Brunswick today." From the budget speech in 2014-15: "These challenges have required us to make tough choices and I have no doubt there are tough choices left to come."

For the opposition to pretend that the fiscal challenges facing our province appeared overnight, I think... It is not the case. We have had these challenges for quite some time.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Elections

Mr. Savoie: I am glad to be able to ask some questions today. I want to give the Premier an opportunity to actually answer a question for once. This should be very simple for him to do. As you know, the former member for Carleton has stepped aside, leaving the seat vacant. I came into this House as the result of a by-election, and, in the Premier's own words, he wanted to make sure that the riding had representation. My question for the Premier—there are two of them—is very simple. Will he set a date in the House to tell us what the date will be? Sorry. Will he give us a date for the by-election in the riding of Carleton?



Hon. Mr. Gallant: I recognize that the member opposite was probably busy campaigning, but what I said back in the day was that it was important that the people of Saint John East had representation in the Legislature when we were about to sit. Clearly, the member opposite left in the middle of the session. Had we called the by-election on the day that he officially resigned, we would probably still not be able to have the member come into the House. Therefore, we have some time to call the by-election. I believe that the legislation gives us up to six months to do so, and it will certainly be called within that time.

I have some other quotes that I would certainly like to put on the floor of the Legislature. In the *Telegraph-Journal* of August 18, 2011, there is a quote from the former Finance Minister: “The tough decisions are only starting”. He also said that “there are a lot of people that we have to convince there really is a problem”. That is a great quote because, now, we have to convince them that we have a problem.

We find the Finance Minister saying: “While it is true that our expense reductions have prevented a much larger deficit, we cannot turn a blind eye to the revenue challenges that our province now faces.”

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Will they acknowledge that these challenges have been here for quite some time?

Mr. Savoie: I thought that was a fairly simple question. I am disappointed that this Premier is going to allow the people of the riding of Carleton to go for an extended period of time without representation. The Premier is taking time, on the floor of this House, to say the kinds of things he is saying. I will ask him this. He was challenged yesterday by the former Minister of Finance to go to the media and talk about the fiscal situation of the province. He did not address it at all, so I will ask him this: Will he have a debate with the former Minister of Finance about the finances of the province?

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have to stick to one theme when you are asking questions.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

You have to stick to one theme when you are asking your questions.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: First of all, we have answered the question regarding the by-election. It is important for people to have representation in the Legislature. That would not be the case in Carleton at the moment. We will therefore ensure that we call the by-election within the mandated time, which is six months.



To the other question, I will be glad to debate the member for Quispamsis when he is Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. I understand that he is very keen to become the leader. I believe the leadership convention will be in 2016, and I cannot wait to have the chance to go into leadership debates with the member opposite.

I would like to quote a few other things. The *Daily Gleaner* said this in 2013:

When you look at the situation we have in the province with declining enrolment in our schools and the number of schools we have, if you look at the number of hospitals we have for a province our size, you look at the roads we maintain for a province our size—we have to look at serious changes in how we do business and how we can best deliver services on a continuous basis in a more effective way.

The member opposite said that throughout his mandate, but, today, he is certainly singing a different tune.

Mr. Savoie: When the by-election in Saint John East came about, we on this side of the House—the PC Party of New Brunswick—won that seat back in a historic win for the province. That was a very short time from when the government took office. Very clearly, the people of the riding said: No, we are rejecting the policies and the direction of this government. It was very clearly done.

The Premier, at that time, said that he took responsibility for that election loss. I will remind the Premier of a couple of things. There are seniors in Carleton County. There are students and university graduates in Carleton County. There are private day care operators. Is the Premier going to take responsibility for another by-election loss?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I very much appreciate the member opposite taking time on the floor of the Legislature to tell us his prediction for the Carleton by-election. Since there was no question, I am going to go back to some quotes. The former member opposite said:

No one is immune to the fiscal situation that we are facing in this province, and we are asking our stakeholders to be prepared to discuss how we can get back to balanced budgets.

That sounds pretty familiar. This is good too.

The AG's report is very clear that we need to focus our energy on infrastructure that is failing, infrastructure that needs our attention, infrastructure that we must look after to get this province back in shape.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: That is interesting. It certainly does not seem to be the position of the opposition now.



I will quote again:

We all can look ourselves in the mirror and say that's why we can't make real decisions. That's why we can't move forward and drive things home.

The member opposite sang a much different tune when he was in government. Why will he not get up on his feet and tell the people of New Brunswick that there are challenges?

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

