

June 3, 2015

[Original]

Government Agenda

Mr. Fitch: In the first seven months, the Premier has made a number of poor choices and has broken several promises. The official opposition has been there with him all the way, has pointed out his errors, and has tried to steer him in the right direction, on the right path. We have not met with much success, but we will not stop trying. It does not help improve the overall condition of the lives of New Brunswickers when the Premier has a government that has no credibility.

Today, I want to try, once again, to offer the Premier a chance to recover some of the credibility that has been lost because of the poor choices of this small Cabinet. We will start by asking him whether he will regain some of his credibility by reversing the seniors' asset grab.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Our position regarding the nursing home policy is very clear: We want it to be progressive, and it certainly is. This policy will ensure that seniors who can afford to pay a little more contribute a little more; it will also ensure that those who have less, get more. We are doing this so that all seniors who move into nursing homes, without exception, receive government funding and assistance. All seniors will get help from the provincial government when they move into nursing homes.

I can say that I disagree with what the Leader of the Opposition has said. I think that, since the very beginning of our mandate, we have worked very hard to improve the lives of New Brunswickers. I am very proud that, since our government was sworn in, 2 500 additional jobs have been created in our economy here in New Brunswick. Our government will continue to make job creation a priority.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: The seniors are not buying the Robin Hood theory of the Premier. He has been described in the media. Again, this is not the opposition describing him. It is the media that is describing him as hapless, bumbling, incompetent, uninformed, inflexible, and even worse than that. None of these words create an aura of confidence in his ability to make good decisions.

In fact, the poor choices that have been made have not created much confidence in the ability to make good decisions for the province. As well, young professionals or young graduates are concerned about the tuition cash rebate. Again, I will try to help the Premier regain some of the credibility that has been lost because of his poor choices. Will he review and cancel the tuition tax rebate in New Brunswick?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is obvious that the opposition wants to try to provide some kind of summary today of what is in our budget. We have been debating our budget for weeks and months, and we certainly can use the time in question period to review all the topics once again. It is obvious that the opposition members are not putting forward any new information or arguments that are any different from the ones we have already debated.

We have clearly indicated our position regarding the tuition tax rebate you are referring to. The program was not working as planned and was not helping New Brunswickers access postsecondary education.

[Original]

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: This program only helped people once they completed their education and found a job. Some might say the objective of the program was to encourage people to stay here, but it obviously was not working. Studies have shown that. We must invest our money strategically, and that is what our government is doing.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: Again, some of the information that the Premier is saying today is a little contradictory to what was said last night in estimates by the member for Portland-Simonds. The Premier is really clarifying or solidifying himself as a person who says one thing and then does another. It was evident in a number of situations, as we went on and on. In talking about saying one thing and doing another, we can look at the things that the government members said about education and literacy before the election and, now, after the election. There is a broken promise in cutting the number of teachers and literacy coordinators.

Again, I will give the Premier an option. He can gain some of the credibility by reversing some of the teacher cuts or maybe by looking at the day care owners and reversing the day care cuts. Taking funds away from privately owned day cares was a decision that the government made. That is affecting not only small businesses, but also parents and children who attend those day cares, because of the increased fees that are occurring. Can the Premier pick one of those? Why not reverse one of those and gain some credibility back?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Indeed, we are investing more in education, we have increased the education budget by 3.1%, and we are investing millions and millions of dollars more in educating young people here in New Brunswick.

[Original]

We are doing what we said we would do. As we pointed out, after 200 days in office, we have started or have implemented a huge percentage of our platform already, in a very short time. On top of that, I think that we have made it very clear to New Brunswickers and to the opposition that we are focused on creating jobs. We are focused on growing the economy, and that is exactly what is happening.

Since we were sworn in, the New Brunswick economy has produced a net gain of 2 500 jobs. We are creating jobs, as we said we would focus on doing. We also said that we would grow the economy, and the Conference Board of Canada has said that the economy will grow by 2.3% and 2.6% over the next two years. We said that we would focus on it, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Fitch: As you focus on the platform, you are shutting down the gas and oil industry in New Brunswick. That moratorium has cost a significant number of investments and jobs in the province. Corridor, today, laid off three full-time employees, and it did not hire the number of students that it hired last summer, which was about 25. The Premier's decisions are having a dramatic effect on jobs and the economy in New Brunswick.

Another huge step that the Premier could take today to gain back some of the credibility and respect that he has lost in the last seven months is to go back to the Auditor General's report, look at pages 41 and 42, and realize that the decisions that were made in the Shawn Graham government were wrong and that the Atcon Six made a decision to reduce the exposure of the province and move it behind the bank.

Again, the Premier could order a full audit, a full forensic audit, and clear the air once and for all. Will he do that today?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: At least, we have made some progress. The Leader of the Opposition has finally admitted that it is a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing. At least, that is some progress. We are very happy to see that happen, at least.

[Translation]

We have been very clear that we are taking the report prepared by the Office of the Auditor General very seriously. When we were in opposition, we supported a motion calling on the Auditor General to analyze the situation and write a report. She made recommendations, and we



clearly indicated that we were going to introduce and implement everything possible to ensure that the recommendations are followed.

Within six months—this is the timeline that has been established—we are really looking forward to showing New Brunswickers which recommendations from the Auditor General we have been able to implement and to telling the Leader of the Opposition and all New Brunswickers how we have considered the report and implemented the recommendations.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: Once again, the Premier is saying one thing and doing another. The other day, the head of the Atcon Six talked about job losses that would result with the creation of the new megacorporation, putting together the New Brunswick Internal Services Agency, the Department of Government Services, FacilicorpNB, and Service New Brunswick.

I wonder whether the Premier could advise the House about this. Are these net job losses, or are these gross job losses? Basically, in total, how many people are going to be faced with uncertainty over the next number of months, as the government tries to figure out the plan or tries to write the business plan that will go forward after creating this megacorporation without having the details or the business plan set to go before making the announcement here in the Legislature? Will the Premier tell us how many people are going to be concerned about their futures and their jobs in New Brunswick because of the decisions that this government is making?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As explained yesterday, this is something we promised in our campaign platform. We said that we were going to centralize many functions to become more efficient and save taxpayers' money. So, that is what we are doing. Yesterday, following the comments from the member for Quispamsis, we were under the impression that the opposition might support this concept, but, now, that does not seem to be the case.

As a government, we have choices to make, and we are going to try to ensure that we provide our services efficiently.

[Original]

We are going to make sure that we become innovative and deliver our services in an efficient way. This will help us get the money that we need to be able to invest in things that will help our health care system, help seniors' care, help education, help the most vulnerable, and, yes, help with our main priority of creating jobs and growing the economy. I am happy to see that the economy and job creation have been going in the right direction over the last few months.



[Translation]

Senior Citizens

Ms. Dubé: For quite some time, the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights has been telling us that, when the Premier was in opposition, he went to the annual meeting of the coalition in Moncton and confirmed that he would not touch seniors' assets. We have asked the Premier many times in the House to confirm this, and the answer was no.

Under pressure, the Premier told us to bring him a recording of these words so that he could go back and clarify what he said.

Hector Cormier, a very honourable man whom we know very well, confirmed in *L'Acadie Nouvelle* that he attended the meeting and that he was responsible for taking notes for the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights. The Premier's words were recorded in the minutes of the annual meeting, based on the notes taken by Hector Cormier.

I would like to give the Premier the opportunity, now that we know his words were recorded—we have the evidence—to confirm to us that he did indeed make this commitment to seniors.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have already answered this question many times; it is too bad that the opposition cannot come to us today with issues that we have not yet discussed at least 100 times. I have answered the question. We are certainly going to play along with the opposition today and give a bit of an update on what has happened in our government since we were sworn in.

[Original]

I am very happy to recap the last few months, if that is what the opposition would like to do today. We are implementing a comprehensive literacy strategy. We have raised the minimum wage. We have created the Youth Employment Fund. We have made postsecondary education more affordable by eliminating the parental and spousal contributions from the calculation. We have been fostering innovation, lowering the small business tax, and increasing the small business investor tax credit from 30% to 50%. We have renewed the Northern and Miramichi funds, established the Jobs Board and Opportunities New Brunswick, improved regional cooperation by reducing barriers, and, yes, since we were sworn in, we have seen the economy produce 2 500 net jobs.



Ms. Dubé: One thing I can add to that list is that the government broke many promises and is going into the pockets of seniors. We are saying no to that.

[Translation]

I will come back to my question. After all, we are talking about a very honourable and well-known person. An honest man is telling us that he took notes and recorded the Premier's words in the minutes, during the annual meeting of the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights. He confirmed that the Premier said that he would not touch seniors' assets.

The Premier told us to bring him a recording in the House proving that he had said these words, so that he could set the record straight. The evidence has now been made public in *L'Acadie Nouvelle*. The Premier's words were recorded. You ask for a recording; well, your words were recorded in the minutes of the coalition.

I am asking you again whether you can confirm that you did in fact make a commitment to seniors to protect their assets and not to take money out of their pockets.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, I repeat that I have answered this question many times. We have been very clear that our nursing home policy will help people who need it the most. Yes, we are going to ask those who we believe can contribute a little more to do so.

So, once again, since we are doing a recap of the last few months, I am also going to take part as a member in this activity.

[Original]

We have done some other things that focus on our priority of creating jobs. We have created the Strategic Infrastructure Initiative, which is a \$900-million investment over six years. We have been working to improve cellular and broadband coverage for rural New Brunswick. We have enhanced the viability of the cultural sector. We have been supporting major projects such as the Energy East Pipeline project, the conversion of the Canaport LNG terminal to an export facility, and many mining opportunities like the Trevali mine and the Sisson mine. There is potash development as well.

We are also focused on our finances, and we are doing this so that we can move our province forward. We are happy with the work that we have done over the last few months.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: We can also add things to this list and talk about all the broken promises about education, literacy, and certainly seniors.

As I told you, Hector Cormier is an honourable man. The Premier told us in the House that he



would look back at what he had said if someone could prove to him what he said. He had made a commitment to seniors. I know that Mr. Cormier is an honest man.

I would like to give the Premier another opportunity to confirm to us that he did indeed make a commitment to seniors. Can he tell us if this is a broken promise, or if he is going to reconsider his position on the policy affecting seniors? It is either one or the other. Is he going to dig into seniors' pockets again? I will give the Premier another opportunity.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, I must say that I have answered the question. We have put forward a progressive policy that will help New Brunswickers. Those who need help the most will get it. We are going to ask those who can pay a bit more to do so. Obviously, we have difficult choices to make.

[Original]

We are making these choices because we want to move our province forward. We need to find the fiscal capacity to sustain and improve health care, seniors' care, day care, education, and our support of the most vulnerable and those who need support. That is why we have made decisions such as ensuring that we release all relevant information about the forest management plan, being as transparent as possible, undertaking a strategic review of all our government spending, ensuring that CEOs of Crown corporations are hired based on merit and competence, publishing expense reports of MLAs, increasing taxes on the richest 1% so that we are able to take that money and invest in our priorities of giving a strong social fabric, and, yes, creating jobs for the people of New Brunswick.

Public Transportation System

Mr. Coon: As members present know, we are in the midst of Environment Week. The theme this year is around reducing consumption. Several municipalities across the province and many of our own constituency offices are participating in the Commuter Challenge. Anyone who takes public transit knows that it can be very challenging to get from point A to point B because transit commissions lack the budgets to provide frequent and efficient service.

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure does not directly fund public transportation. Can the minister explain why his department spends tens of millions of dollars to support private transportation and nothing to support public transportation?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Last week, my colleague from Moncton East and I participated in a joint announcement in the city of Moncton, where we are helping out with public transit. We have been strategically investing in public transit.

I would remind the member that, in this capital budget, we are also investing in renewable energy sources for our own assets, our own buildings. We believe that this is the right thing to do—to have more efficient energy and renewable energy in the way we supply energy to our buildings.



Certainly we need to do more. We completely agree with this. As we move forward, we believe that this is the right direction in which to go—to keep investing strategically in terms of renewable energy and public transit.

Mr. Coon: Across the country, about 7% of transit revenue comes from provincial governments. That is not the case in New Brunswick. This makes us one of the odd ones out. In a world where fuel prices are volatile and the climate is warming rapidly, this government needs to provide for its citizens. It needs to provide a reliable and adequately funded public transit system, and that means contributing to what the municipalities contribute from their budgets and from ticket sales.

Will the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure reallocate a small amount of funding to support public transit in this province?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Certainly all jurisdictions need to do more. We need to see more public transit. We need to invest strategically in these types of initiatives. The municipalities do a good job. The provincial government participates when it can in these types of initiatives. Our government participates in some announcements, and we have contributed financially to some of these public transit services that are offered around the province. However, we do it in partnership. That is why we have said, in our capital budget, that, when we can leverage our dollars with municipalities, and certainly with the federal government, we do so. This is one example of things that did happen.

I would remind the member that renewable energy is part of our strategy. Last week, the Minister of Energy announced an initiative whereby we will see more community-based renewable energy in the windmill sector. This is part of renewable energy and investing strategically.

Mr. Coon: To follow up on the question regarding public transit, the law currently restricts municipalities from serving their metropolitan areas with transit by requiring city transit commissions to operate within city limits. This means, for example, that Fredericton Transit does not have the authority to send a bus from downtown to the airport, from downtown to Oromocto, or from downtown to New Maryland.

Will the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure ensure that these restrictions are eliminated to give Fredericton Transit and the other public transit systems the freedom to serve larger markets beyond their city limits?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: To respond to the question, I have never received a request with regard to the question the member asked this morning. Any time we could encourage public transportation, we would do so. We believe that municipalities do a good job. We participate with them when we can, and we want to leverage our investments with other levels of government. We have a rural province, and that becomes challenging with regard to how we can offer public transit in some of our rural communities. The municipalities do a great job. They do what they can, and, when we can partner with them on public transit, we do.



With regard to the specific question that was asked, I have never received a request for that. If I did, we would certainly assess it.

Expenses

Mr. Stewart: It has been a little over a year since the Minister of Tourism had to rise and apologize for misleading the House over expenses. It was in March 2014. I rise today to point out that, while in opposition, the Minister of Tourism had a great deal to say on the matter of posting expenses in a timely fashion. Yet, today, his expenses have not been posted, and they are way overdue.

Would the Minister of Tourism like to rise again to apologize to the House on the matter of expenses? This time, his apology could be for the double standard under which he and his Premier are operating. Will the minister get up to apologize?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is a bit unfortunate to hear the words used by the opposition member. Our government is very transparent with regard to initiatives and projects that we are undertaking to serve New Brunswickers. Certainly, we want to be more transparent with regard to our expenditures.

Furthermore, when I ran for the leadership of the Liberal Party, I was the only person to provide a list of people who had contributed more than \$100 to my campaign. I did so voluntarily, because I wanted to be transparent. Also, I believe it is important for people to know what is happening with their representatives. So, there is no doubt that our government is always increasing transparency with regard to the public, and if members of the opposition have recommendations or suggestions for us, we would be happy to hear them, but I hope that they will not take the road that leads to finger pointing.

[Original]

Mr. Stewart: There are many things that are unfortunate today. There is no sign of the Minister of Tourism, there is no answer to my question, and there is a series of broken promises—God knows what is hidden.

In February 2014, the Minister of Tourism stated that he and the Liberals were walking the walk and not just talking the talk. Sometime between February 2014 and June 2015, it seems as though the Minister of Tourism and his colleagues stopped walking, but they sure have not stopped talking.

Will the Tourism Minister get on his feet for once and tell us why his expenses, and those of his Cabinet colleagues and their political staff, have not been posted online?



Hon. Mr. Gallant: As tempting as it is, the member opposite does not have to treat this like the wild, wild West and try to lure people into debating with him. We have serious matters to discuss, and we are more than willing to answer questions. We are also more than willing to receive suggestions and ideas from the opposition members. Unfortunately, they fall short when it comes to providing that.

We have been very clear. We want to be as transparent as possible. If anybody is not up to date, I am sure they will do whatever they have to do to ensure they are being as transparent as possible. That is the guiding principle of the decisions we have been making and the way we want to operate the government. We have done things to make sure we are transparent, things such as hiring CEOs in a very transparent, competency-based, and merit-based fashion and ensuring that expenses are online. I also divulged the names of all the people who donated to my leadership campaign—anyone who gave more than \$100—when I was running for the Liberal Party, and I did that voluntarily. We want to be transparent because transparency leads to accountability, which will lead to better results.

Mr. Stewart: News flash—we are concerned about the expenses today, and none of them are online. Everyone in New Brunswick is curious to know how much the Premier has spent running away from New Brunswick. When things got tough a couple of weeks ago, he jetted off to British Columbia, and you do not fly to British Columbia cheaply. We want to know how much the Premier has spent travelling around the province and across North America, but we have no way of knowing because the expenses have not been posted online in a timely fashion, which is something the Liberals constantly crowed about while in opposition.

It appears that the Gallant government holds itself to a much lower standard than it held our government to. That is okay because everyone has learned in the last seven months how much lower the expectations are for the Liberals than for the Progressive Conservatives. Will the Minister of Tourism admit that this is the case? The government is holding itself to a much lower standard.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have been very clear that being transparent is an important part of what we want to do. If there is anything more we can do, we will certainly do the best we can to accomplish that. In fact, I am told—I have not seen it myself—that the minister whose expenses are being questioned by the member opposite had his expenses go up from October 2014 to December 2014. If there are some issues with others, we will certainly make sure, as a government, that we deal with them swiftly.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The opposition members talk about walking the walk and talking the talk. They try to pretend that they are here to protect all New Brunswickers, yet they voted against taxing the richest 1% among us to provide important social programs for those who need the support.



They are against giving seniors who have less and who have spouses or dependants at home more money in their pockets under our policy. On top of that, it is completely flabbergasting that the Progressive Conservatives, as they are called, voted against raising the minimum wage for the people of our beautiful province.

(Interjections.)

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

Community College

Mr. Jody Carr: My question is with regard to significant cuts for students with learning disabilities. The Gallant government has made significant cuts to the public education system. Those have become largely well known, and the vast majority of these cuts are largely affecting students with learning disabilities.

My questions today are not on the school system but, this time, with regard to community college. Training cuts for students with learning disabilities are of concern. Can the Minister of Post-Secondary Education confirm whether the cut to community colleges for learning disability support services is, in fact, \$3.3 million in the community college system? How many jobs are being cut in New Brunswick community colleges?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The preamble was quite wide there. It touched on a lot of different things. Again, as the Minister responsible for Strategic Program Review, I can say that our government is undertaking a very extensive look at all programs and services, in all departments and all parts of the civil service, to make sure that we are doing things in the most efficient manner possible, that we are getting the best return on investment that we can, and that we are providing the programs and services that New Brunswickers expect. We are respecting our priorities as a government, which are job creation and economic development, providing for families, and, most importantly, balancing the fiscal situation of the province. We need to do that as a government, as a province, if we are to continue to provide the various programs and services that New Brunswickers expect from their government.

Mr. Jody Carr: I guess when the ministers do not know who should answer the question, they turn to the Strategic Program Review. The question was quite clearly with regard to the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. The Premier needs to know that making cuts affecting the most vulnerable, or righting the fiscal ship by making cuts affecting the most vulnerable, is not leadership.

In fact, on Tuesday morning, at the Disability Awareness Week breakfast, at an event hosted by the Premier's own advisory council, I was told by someone who was losing their job at the community college that there was a \$3.3-million cut at the community college for learning disability support services. Virtually all learning support services are being eliminated at the end of June. Are people with disabilities not part of the economic solution?



Can the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour confirm that there has been \$3.3 million in cuts to student learning services? Can she inform the House as to how much this represents?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I do not want to leave the House today with the impression that we do not care at all about disabled persons; on the contrary, I was very pleased to join several ministers and private government members in attending the breakfast to celebrate and promote people with disabilities. We certainly want to work with these people to find a way to ensure that disabled persons, who represent 17% of the population of New Brunswick, are able to help us meet our challenges, including helping us to deal with the labour shortage.

[Original]

I have to take issue with what was said by the member opposite when he said that we are not protecting the most vulnerable. These are the same individuals who are against our policy of asking those who have a bit more to pay a bit more so that we can make sure we are sustainable in the long term, but also to give more money to those who need it. This is the group that is against our raising the minimum wage for the working New Brunswickers who need a bit of support from government. It is unfortunate that they are talking from both sides of their mouths.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

