

May 18, 2016

[Original]

Legislation

Mr. Fitch: I have just a few questions for the Premier this morning so he can go out and address the folks on the lawn. We have a number of topics as well, and we know that we have a limited number of question periods this year compared to other years. I have just a few questions, and, if the Premier could give us some quick, good answers, we will move along quite quickly.

Yesterday, I asked the Premier about the involvement of Bertrand LeBlanc in the Indian Island wind project. We acknowledged that he was the vice-president of the Liberal Party. He was also the campaign chair for the 2014 provincial election. My question arose from the fact that the questioning on Bill 12 was cut off so quickly last Wednesday. I asked the Premier to get briefed. The Premier has had all night to get briefed and to get his speech memorized. Would the Premier tell us his understanding of why the committee was cut short so quickly and without any warning last Wednesday afternoon?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: That is the same question as yesterday. It is kind of difficult to understand that type of question. With that being said, we all know that we were working in a subcommittee last week and there were many, many pieces of different legislation that were discussed. Certainly, there was a discussion on the *Crown Construction Contracts Act* amendment, Bill 15, and we have debated that many, many times. There were many good questions and, I believe, many pertinent answers that came from the side of the government. At the end of the day, there was a decision made to stop discussion at that time.

The committee has not finished its job, and the bill has not been voted on yet. It may come back, and, if it does, there will certainly be more questions from the opposition. We will keep providing the answers. That is what happened last week. We are open to more questions today if the opposition wants to ask questions.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier did not take that question. I guess that means that he has the ability or the availability to go out and talk to the folks on the lawn of the Legislature and explain to them what is going on with the Gagetown ferry and how he can spend so much money on other projects but cut their ferry, which provides a livelihood and safe transportation between communities within the province.

I asked the Premier to come up and get briefed on the involvement of Bertrand LeBlanc, the vice-president of the Liberal Party and the campaign chair for the 2014 campaign. Could the Premier answer the question of who is paying Mr. LeBlanc on this Indian Island wind project? If the bill goes through and if the Indian Island wind project goes forward, what compensation



would Mr. LeBlanc receive because of this government's ramming through Bill 12 and allowing NB Power not to go through public tenders?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: To start, to correct the leader of the opposition, Bertrand LeBlanc has nothing to do with the Indian Island project.

I find it unfortunate that the members opposite, including the Leader of the Opposition, are continuously dragging various projects through the mud—very important renewable projects, community projects across our province, the ones from the First Nations communities.

We passed legislation last year to bring forward the opportunity for First Nations to participate in and bring forward renewable programs. It is an independent process by NB Power. The request for expressions of interest went out back in January. It ended on April 30. I am very proud to say to this Legislature that, according to NB Power, do you know how many projects we got from First Nations communities? We got 23 from throughout the province. As for the Indian Island project, it is one of the 23. With Indian Island, there are 8 First Nations communities working together. You never saw that under your government.

Mr. Fitch: That is very rich coming from the minister who cannot say “Simonds” correctly.

The minister sounds like a bad infomercial, worse than Slap Chop. Really, it is really despicable. Shame on the government for allowing the now-dubbed spokesperson for the Liberal Party, the spokesperson for the government, the man who goes out to almost every CBC panel... On every contentious issue, he is the one who stands up. The Premier should be ashamed of himself for not standing up, taking questions, and answering them. I will give him another topic, and hopefully, the Premier will stand up and answer the questions. If not, he should go out to the front of the lawn, address the protesters, and explain to them why the government is cutting the Gagetown ferry.

Student Aid

I wonder whether the Premier knows exactly how many students attend private universities and colleges in New Brunswick. Regardless of where they are on the economic scale, whether they are above \$60 000 or below, how many is he excluding? How many students is he affecting with his TAB program?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: I will not let the Leader of the Opposition go off on a tangent and then switch the topic when he throws some good New Brunswickers under the rug—people who are working with First Nations communities. He makes it seem as if they have just started to work, as if Bertin LeBlanc has just started to work on the Indian Island project. That is totally wrong. It has been many, many years.

Actually, I think the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Energy back in 2011. I have a report here where the former Energy Minister set up this energy commission led by two



political cronies, Jeannot Volpé and Bill Thompson. If you want to talk about politics, those are two individuals who were very involved in politics. Do you know what? Bertin LeBlanc, on behalf of Indian Island, in 2011—that is five years ago—presented this exact project to that government. I listen to the Leader of the Opposition asking these questions, so does that mean his project was never approved because he is a Liberal?

Mr. Fitch: The member opposite talks about throwing good New Brunswickers under the bus. Well, the Premier has thrown a number of students under the bus with his TAB program.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fitch: How many students has the Premier thrown under the bus with his TAB program—students that are not eligible for the compensation that the government is talking about because their dreams have taken them to private universities and private colleges here in New Brunswick? I am sure there are many students. Does the Premier know how many students he has thrown under the bus because he has made a hurried policy—a policy on the back of a napkin, a policy that does not include people who have dreams of becoming programmers, IT technicians, dental assistants, and veterinary assistants or of going into a police foundations type of program? How many students who go to private colleges has he affected in a negative way because he has rushed this program in order to get a quick photo op and a headline in the newspaper?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is estimated that 7 100 students will be able to benefit from TAB—over 7 000 students who find themselves in a family situation with an income of \$60 000 or less annually. I think it is very important to note that other families with an income of over \$60 000... Yes, people who go to universities that are private or colleges that are private also have challenges. We recognize that. We do, and we are doing the best we can to help everybody with programs, such as ensuring that loans and grants are accessible by removing the parental contribution and by ensuring that the Timely Completion Benefit is there as well to support students.

What we know also is that every student coming from a family with an income of \$60 000 or less annually is struggling to go to university or college. We are very happy to help them and to help our universities and colleges that are publicly funded as well.

Mr. Fitch: Again, when we look at the types of programs the government has excluded, they are programs that can lead to jobs right away. In a short period of time, we could get people back to work. We have 37 000 New Brunswickers out of work, and what we want to make sure happens here is that the people whose dreams led them to take programming, web design, police foundations, optician assistant, dental assistant, travel and hospitality, marketing, sales, medical officer, pharmacy technician, veterinary assistant or technician, IT, programming...



Those are the types of students that have been excluded if they go to a private college. Those are the types of students that this program leaves behind.

When we look at some of the changes that have occurred, we know that more could be done if this program were done in the right way, with a sliding scale and by including private colleges and universities. Again, we have put a motion on the floor. I ask the Premier: Will he support a motion that includes nonpartisan consultation with the opposition and with other institutions and associations to make sure this program is done right?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, I must point out that the program we introduced will enable over 7 000 more students to go to university or college thanks to greater financial support. That means over 7 000 more people who will go to university or college in this province.

There is no doubt that private universities and colleges are important, too; we support them, and we have programs for students who attend these institutions. However, our public universities and colleges are facing serious financial challenges, and one way to help them is to increase enrolment. With this program, we are going to help those who need it most and, at the same time, help our institutions that receive government support.

Extra-Mural Program

Ms. Dubé: We know that the Minister of Health is still negotiating with Medavie EMS to ensure it is responsible for extra-mural services. We know these negotiations are taking place behind closed doors and that people are extremely worried.

So, my question is for the Minister of Health. You say that you consulted stakeholders, but would people who receive services under the Extra-Mural Program not be stakeholders? Did the minister indeed consult clients or patients, meaning people who receive services under the Extra-Mural Program?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre keeps asking the same questions about discussions we are having with Medavie EMS regarding the possibility of combining three programs that all have been immensely successful in the province. However, we think something even better can be done with these three programs, and we are looking at possibly combining them under the same management.

Yes, we are consulting the health networks, and they have patients that are part of their organization. We are also consulting the three unions involved, and we have met with them a few times. As for professional associations, whether doctors, nurses, or social workers, we continue to consult with them. In the end, if we come up with a decent project, we will sign on...



[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: My question was not repetitive at all. I asked if the minister had consulted New Brunswick patients receiving Extra-Mural Program services. Once again, the minister is so set on what he wants to do that he does not necessarily listen to the people of New Brunswick.

Here is my second question for the Minister of Health: Is this really a concern for him? He is negotiating with a company that sells insurance. In fact, Medavie EMS is, above all, an insurance company, and it will have access to medical files. Is this a concern for the minister? Would that not be enough to stop the discussions taking place behind closed doors?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The member opposite continues to fearmonger on this project. We are in discussions with what I would argue is a very reputable company, a company that is based in New Brunswick, a company that provides hundreds of jobs to New Brunswickers, a company that has been in the health care sector—not only in the insurance business, but also in the health care sector—for decades. These are professionals. We have professionals within our department, and we have professionals within our RHAs within each of these three programs that we are looking to combine.

There have been extensive consultations. There are going to continue to be extensive consultations. We want to make sure that this model is put together correctly and that it is going to provide the results that we hope it will provide. If, during the discussions, we come to the realization that it is not possible, then the project will not move forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: What we are questioning is the competence of the Gallant government and the minister. The recipients, New Brunswickers, are concerned that their personal and confidential medical records will end up in the hands of a company that sells insurance. It is not complicated. The minister says he is consulting, but he has never, ever, consulted patients, recipients, or New Brunswickers to find out whether they agree with their personal and confidential records ending up in the hands of an insurance company.

Would that not be enough to say that it is time to move on and preserve the Extra-Mural Program? We could even help develop this program, because it is a gem for New Brunswick. More support of the program is needed to provide more home care. Could the minister commit to ending the ongoing discussions and helping develop the Extra-Mural Program within the health networks?



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: If we were to accept the member's logic, Medavie EMS could not even provide ambulance service. Yet the company has been providing this service in New Brunswick for more than eight years now, and it is very successful at doing so.

We have an opportunity here to create what we believe could be a great project for all New Brunswickers. It is about combining three programs that work very well in isolation. The idea is to break down silos and ensure that the three programs can work together in order to improve the health of the people of this province.

We want to make sure that we can keep people in their homes for as long as possible. We do not want people to go into nursing homes or hospitals sooner than expected; we want to keep them in their homes for as long as possible. We think that what we are proposing can help us ensure New Brunswickers stay in their homes for as long as possible.

[Original]

Tendering

Mr. Jeff Carr: It has been almost a year now since we had the issue with snowplow contracts here in the province. The oversight on those contracts allowed the awarding of the contracts to go outside of the province for a measly \$1 600.

The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and I had a frank discussion during the estimates committee in March about going forward and how many new trucks would be ordered going into the future. In the budget, 22 new trucks were to be ordered. I am wondering whether the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure can give us an update on whether that budget number is still there and whether we will still see the 22 trucks this year.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We had addressed this during committee work. I agree that there was a good dialogue between the official opposition critic and me. Obviously, that is still the plan. The process is ongoing. I had explained, though, to the member opposite that, out of the 22 plows, we would look at having a number of them be turnkey deliveries. In other words, we would procure plows with everything included. We would not have to customize any of the equipment that would be added to the plow. We would buy a turnkey solution as a piece of equipment.

The other piece that I mentioned to the member opposite is that we also want to look at procuring as we do with school buses. We would do it in a Maritime fashion so that we have more economies of scale. We are also working toward doing that. It takes some time, but, certainly, we want to cooperate, from a Maritime perspective, to see economies of scale and savings as we procure equipment.

Mr. Jeff Carr: We talked about those numbers, and we also talked about the turnkey operations and how they relate to the school bus tendering. There is some overlap, and there are some discrepancies in that argument.



The timeline for ordering these vehicles is at a premium. In order to have those vehicles in stock, ready, and put together to be put on the road, time is running out to have those tenders out. There are 8 trucks with all the plows and attachments being tendered out privately right now—8 that our own employees used to manufacture—with an option for 2 more. If 8 are ordered, that leaves 14 missing. Will the minister tell us today whether he is going to tender out those 14 trucks that will come into the shop and be put together, sooner rather than later?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I really appreciate the question because summer is just around the corner and we are already talking about snowplows. I think that it is important that we do that because we have to prepare in advance. As a department and a government, we always want to look ahead and plan ahead. We look not only over the next few weeks or months, but also over the long term. Absolutely, we are going to procure the 22 plows that we have in the capital budget.

However, I want to say this: We also made sure that, through the government and through the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, we would focus the majority of the dollars being invested in procurement on the procurement of school buses. We believe that school buses are very much more essential in terms of making sure that our kids are safe as they commute to school.

However, plows are also very important, and we are going to procure the plows. The process is ongoing. Some will be procured traditionally, and some will be procured in a turnkey solution. We believe that it will be done for the next winter season.

Mr. Jeff Carr: Ordering our new plows to replace our aging fleet is an important issue. Last year, when the fiasco happened with the failed contract, the minister had a knee-jerk reaction and cancelled the contract without really looking into the implications of doing so. He decided to refurbish some of our old plows, and they did not stand up through the winter. All over the province, plows were breaking over and over and over, which created downtime and emergency situations when emergency vehicles and other such vehicles could not get through our unplowed roads.

A year ago in June, the minister promised that he would review the process to protect New Brunswickers and to make sure that New Brunswickers are able to put these trucks together right here in our province. Our tradespeople are valued, have worked here a long time, and are loyal to New Brunswick. Has the minister reviewed that process, as he promised, to protect New Brunswickers with these contracts?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: This is an interesting question. Obviously, we want to see as many New Brunswickers, as many New Brunswick suppliers, and as many New Brunswick service providers as possible doing business with the provincial government. We know that the government procures services and products on a regular basis every year, and we certainly want to see New Brunswick companies being able to take advantage of that situation. It is a tendering process. We have never seen so many services and products tendered historically as what we have seen



since we took office. We believe in open and competitive bidding and getting the bigger bang for our dollars.

We also know that there are interprovincial trade agreements that need to be respected. We have to be very careful in how these things are done. We want to see New Brunswick companies benefit, but we also want to see New Brunswick companies being able to offer their services and products in other jurisdictions so that they can compete.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Pay Equity

Mr. Coon: Today, I have questions regarding the 4 000 New Brunswickers, mostly women who are poorly paid, who work in our school system as educational assistants and library workers. They commenced a pay equity process in 2011, and it was finalized last September. However, they have yet to receive their revised and backdated compensation. Will the Minister of Finance, in his role as Chair of the Board of Management, explain to the House when these educational assistants and library workers will be compensated as per the outcome of their pay equity settlement?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: First of all, I want to say that I appreciate the question from the member and leader of the third party.

Yes, we did in fact receive this report last fall. You will understand that a lot of work was done and that pay equity is an issue that we care about. As a matter of fact, yesterday, we tabled a bill to advance women's rights. We are fully aware of the importance of this file, and we are working very, very hard on it. Rest assured that this file is very important to our government.

[*Original*]

Mr. Coon: The question is this: When will the educational assistants and library workers be compensated as per the outcome of their pay equity settlement? It is a pay equity settlement that was signed off last fall. Everyone knows that our education assistants work very hard. They are instrumental to the success of the inclusion policy in our province. We are reaching the end of the school year. Can the minister confirm that the pay equity settlement will be paid out before the end of the school year?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Indeed, as the member very clearly said, we are well aware of the significant role these people play in our system. Most of them are women, and our government



is fully aware of the significant role they play in inclusion, which is a fundamental policy. You know, New Brunswick is a leader on the whole issue of diversity and respect.

What I can tell the member is that I am not going to say today that we will be making announcements in the House, since that is not planned. However, I can tell him that we are working on this file diligently and seriously. At the right time and place, I will be pleased to make the necessary announcements.

[Original]

Mr. Coon: The women who work as educational assistants and library workers do not feel very championed, and they do not feel very respected. Not only have they not received compensation and adjustments as a result of the pay equity settlement, but they have also been without a contract for three years. This is how we respect and champion the women who work every day in our schools to help the kids who need help to be able to be included in our classrooms. It is not acceptable.

They want to know when they can expect to have their pay equity settlement delivered, when the cheques are going to arrive, and when, in fact, their contract is going to be settled. If this will not be before the end of the school year, can the minister guarantee that these issues will be resolved by the end of this calendar year?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I can assure the member that we are working very hard on this file, and I am sure that he is well aware that collective bargaining is not done in the House. You know, we are fully aware that people who work in this field are essential to our education system. We are well aware that we have received a report on pay equity. At the right time and place, we will be pleased to make the necessary announcements.

[Original]

Ferry Service

Mr. Wetmore: The government used its Strategic Program Review as an excuse to close the Gagetown ferry. The Gallant government claims to be saving money by closing the Gagetown ferry, yet it is paying over \$850 000 for ferry service to Kennebecasis Island. If the committee can show how to provide ferry service to both Gagetown and Kennebecasis Island for less than \$850 000, is the Premier willing to sit down with the Save the Gagetown Ferry Committee to discuss this?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I have myself sat down with the committee. We had a very constructive discussion. I have listened to the arguments and, certainly, to the information the committee members provided to me. They were concerned that any changes to the transportation means



in their area would affect tourism and maybe affect the condition of the existing infrastructure. I have listened to the committee members.

I actually went to meet with the mayor afterward, and we had a constructive conversation. We offered to work with and to cooperate with the community to see how we could grow tourism, which they told me was one of their big concerns, that it could be affecting tourism. We offered to work collaboratively with the community to try to increase its capacity for tourism. We have been dialoguing with the committee. However, we certainly had to make a difficult decision, and it was going to cost an estimated \$5 million to replace the ferry.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Wetmore: The government members say they want to save money, but, when they are given the opportunity, they say no.

On the CBC political panel, we discussed the ferry issue. The minister joined by telephone, and a lot of good points were brought up. One of those points was that our Queens County farmers would now be forced to move farm equipment along the Trans-Canada Highway. It sounds crazy, but the average speed is going to be 122 km/h. Can the Premier not see how extremely dangerous this is, to move farm equipment on a highway with speeds of 123 km/h when the farm equipment will be travelling 25 km/h?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I do have to say this today. The reason we, as a government, are in this situation today of making difficult choices with regard to the Gagetown ferry and ferries in general is that, when the members opposite were in government, they did not invest in the river ferry system. They neglected to put forward the appropriate dollars to renew the fleet and to make sure that the fleet could respond to the demands on the entire fleet and the demands of the surrounding communities.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We are stuck with a situation that the members opposite could not fix. We had to make a difficult choice.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We had to make a difficult choice to see how we could address the fleet. We had to decide that we could not invest the \$5 million. We prefer to invest \$5 million in education and long-term care and in making sure that there is economic growth across the province.





Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. The time for question period has expired.

