

July 6, 2016

[Original]

Opportunities New Brunswick

Mr. Fitch: Today, we would like to ask a number of questions. I know that there are many people who have a number of questions to ask, and we know that the Legislature is being shut down by a motion of this government. So we are going to be quick with our questions here today.

I have one quick question for the minister responsible for Economic Development and ONB. Could the minister rise and tell us why ONB has not filed an annual report as of yet?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are not going to allow the opposition members to go with five member statements regarding electoral reform and then have them completely change the subject. If they want to talk about that, let's talk about it. I cannot believe...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, members. Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I cannot believe that the opposition members are saying, on one hand, that they need a neutral committee to be able to look at electoral reform, but then, on the other hand, that they will not participate in the committee. On one hand, they are saying that they want nothing to do with this process, but, on the other hand, they are admitting, by the rashness of their comments, that they did not even look at the document.

They have not talked to us about what the composition of the committee would look like. In fact, we are not even seeking the majority of the composition of the committee. I have to ask the Leader of the Opposition to clarify why he thinks that his MLAs should not work with and should not participate in the electoral reform committee.

Mr. Fitch: I ask the question because jobs and the economy are our number one priority here in New Brunswick. There are 38 000 New Brunswickers out of work, and those 38 000 New Brunswickers want to know this: Is there a job plan for the province of New Brunswick, and what is going to get them back to work?

What will get those people who are looking for jobs back to work is a plan from this government, so I ask the minister who is responsible for Economic Development and Opportunities New Brunswick this: Why has Opportunities New Brunswick not put forward its annual report? Maybe it was written in secret, behind closed doors, but the fact of the matter is



that a year has gone by. Where is the report from ONB? I would like the minister who is responsible for Economic Development and ONB to get up and answer this question.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The reports will be published within the established timelines. I must tell the opposition members to look at the statistics, because, when it comes to economic growth, I think New Brunswickers are doing some wonderful things.

In 2015, while the Canadian economy was not going in the right direction, our GDP grew by 1.9% here in New Brunswick, and our economy grew. I would remind you that this happened while the Canadian economy was really not doing well. New Brunswickers worked very hard to produce the largest increase in our GDP since 2010. In terms of growth, it was in fact the fourth strongest in the country in 2015.

Great things are happening because of the hard-working people, businesses, and entrepreneurs of New Brunswick. We are very proud to partner with them to grow the economy here, in New Brunswick.

[*Original*]

Mr. Fitch: The Premier will remember that we had a plan for forestry. We had a blueberry strategy here in the province. We had a plan for natural resource development here in the province. Many of the numbers that have been quoted by the Premier are the result of good, solid plans—not to mention the plan for tourism as well, which, again, was a good plan to create jobs.

We are asking the Minister responsible for Opportunities New Brunswick... We know that the member for Fundy-The Isles-West Saint John was demoted from that position. Now, he is the House Leader. I am asking the new minister—the former Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, who is now responsible for the Opportunities New Brunswick file—to just tell us why the annual report has not been released for ONB. What are they trying to hide? What is the new minister trying to hide? Set a new tone, and release the report.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, I repeat that the reports regarding Crown corporations will be published within the established timelines.

[*Original*]

I have to take issue with the condescending comments and questions from the opposition, suggesting that the House Leader was demoted. I do not even have time to name all the titles for which he is responsible in our government within the 40 seconds that are left. The minister



is doing great work and working very hard at developing our natural resources and energy projects in a responsible manner.

Again, there are positive things happening in New Brunswick. From November 2014 to November 2015, the second-largest wage growth in the country was here in New Brunswick. That means that average New Brunswickers who are working hard, middle-class New Brunswickers or people on low incomes who are striving to get to the middle class, saw wage growth during that period.

I am sorry, but we have no lessons to learn from the opposition members because, when they were in government, none of this was happening.

Mr. Fitch: There is a list of negatives with that.

The Premier promised 5 000 jobs in his first year. He promised 10 000 jobs in his first mandate. The minister responsible failed the Premier by not providing those jobs. He failed the people of New Brunswick by not providing those jobs. That is a demotion. When you are in a position and you fail your boss, that is a demotion. The new House Leader could not even negotiate getting out of the House at a reasonable time and with reasonable experience.

Again, I am asking the new minister who was promoted to Opportunities New Brunswick and Economic Development... Jobs are a priority. That is what has been said. Can the minister stand up and answer this question? It must have been covered in the briefings. Where is the annual report for ONB, and when is the minister going to release it?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I find it very interesting that the Leader of the Opposition does not want to talk to me. Usually, opposition members want me to get up and answer questions. If I do not, they criticize me. This time, I get up, but the Leader of the Opposition does not want to talk to me. I can talk about what is going on in terms of economic development.

[Original]

An increase of 1.9% to our GDP is the largest increase since 2010. That is right. We skipped over the Conservative government, of which the Leader of the Opposition was a member. We had the largest increase in our GDP in 2015, the fourth largest in the country.

On top of that, we had IBM create 250 jobs in Florenceville-Bristol, Saint John, and Fredericton. We had OrganiGram, with over 100 jobs, and Groupe Savoie, with approximately 40 jobs in the northwest. Blue Ocean created dozens of jobs in Bathurst. BMM signed for 1 000 jobs. There were 400 jobs with WestJet. DEW, on the Miramichi... What was that? It had 90 jobs, I believe.



On top of that, we are investing in our infrastructure. We have the Youth Employment Fund. We are getting people to work, and we are getting people to come back to New Brunswick.

Mr. Fitch: The history books show that BMM signed for 1 000 jobs that will be created over five years. People need jobs today. People want jobs today. The employment numbers are being reduced right now. That is why the Minister of Economic Development was switched. That is why there is a new Minister of Economic Development today. It is because the results have been dismal. Again, WestJet has 400 jobs, but they will be four years from now. People need a paycheque right now, and that paycheque is getting smaller and smaller based on the decisions of this government.

Will the new Minister responsible for Opportunities New Brunswick and Minister of Economic Development in New Brunswick, which is a priority for the government, get up today to answer this question? When is the annual report for ONB, the Crown corporation responsible for economic development, to be released in the House or to the public so that we can see what results have occurred in the last year?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have answered the question several times.

What I will do is no longer give credit to the Leader of the Opposition. I have to call him out for what he is saying this morning. He is trying to take credit for the 1.9% increase in the GDP. It was all his government, all the plans that it put forward. That is what he said this morning. Everything that is good is because of them. Everything that might not be so good would be because of us. That is his view.

What is interesting is that, in the same morning, the member is now saying that BMM, WestJet, and others signed to create thousands of jobs in New Brunswick over the next few years, but people need jobs now. If we are going to take his logic that the 1.9% increase in the GDP was the work of the members opposite, the reason no jobs are coming to fruition right now is because they did not sign any. They signed zero when they were in government. Invest NB was a complete failure. We have been focused on economic development with the people of New Brunswick. The 1.9% increase in our GDP demonstrates that we are getting results.

[*Translation*]

Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements

Ms. Dubé: Just recently, the city of Edmundston received heavy rain, which, of course, caused tremendous damage to municipal infrastructure. Moreover, many houses were affected, with sewage entering basements and so on. My question is for the Minister of Public Safety: Will you actually provide assistance to the municipality and especially to its people, who have been hit hard by this situation?



Hon. Mr. Landry: Actually, I tried to call the mayor as soon as the incident occurred last week. Unfortunately, we were unable to speak at that time. However, I did talk to him on Monday. The municipality is currently trying to assess all the damage that was done, because, if it is over a certain amount, the province can provide assistance. That being said, as long as we do not know how much is necessary, it will be difficult for us to do what needs to be done.

As we all know, a certain threshold must be reached before the department gets involved. I want to tell the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre that we are very active on this file and that we are just waiting for the figures to know if we are allowed to provide assistance to the municipality of Edmundston. Once we have the figures, we will act immediately, if necessary.

Ms. Dubé: I thank the minister for inquiring about the situation, but you still added a caveat, because I believe the required amount to get federal assistance in case of a disaster is \$2.6 million, if memory serves. However, you are adding a caveat. People have been hit hard, and, to receive federal assistance, the damage must amount to \$2.6 million. That is fine, but if the damage assessment comes to \$2.5 million, will the province be able to provide assistance to people, since they will still need it?

Hon. Mr. Landry: It is very difficult for me to rise in the House and answer a hypothetical question. I talked to the mayor of Edmundston, and he agreed with me. The city is carrying out assessments. I worked with my colleague from the Edmundston region, and we will act accordingly. As soon as we have the actual figures and can answer questions about the heavy rainfall in the area, we will act. Indeed, we are talking about over 70 mm of rain, so 2.5 in, during a very short period. The mayor told me that 60 mm of rain fell in the first hour.

We know that all this rain caused damage. I have a brother who lives in Edmundston, and he told me this weekend about the damage caused in the city. We are going to do everything we can to help these people once we have the figures that meet the criteria.

Ms. Dubé: Again, I want to be clear, because you indicated that you would provide assistance to the municipality and the people if—it is always if—the value of the damage reaches \$2.6 million. So I am using the word “if” again, and I am asking you what would happen if it reached \$2.5 million. In that case, the federal government would not be involved, but the province could decide to be.

So, my question to you, honourable minister, is this: Are you going to provide assistance to people in Edmundston who have been hit hard by heavy rainfall, in one way or another, with or without a contribution under the federal program? Some homes sustained a lot of damage, and some owners are not even insured anymore.

Of course, my question is specific: Can people expect assistance from their provincial government, even if the federal government, based on its criteria, does not contribute to this assistance?



[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I think my colleague answered the question from the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre. I want to take the opportunity to say this: During 6 of 7 consecutive sitting days, the member rose and asked 18 questions about our project with Medavie EMS. I find that ironic. Furthermore, it is worth telling the House and the public that, since the former Conservative Premier, Bernard Lord, has become CEO of Medavie EMS, the member no longer asks questions about this topic.

[Original]

I think that this is important to point out, so I am going to repeat it, just to make sure.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Six out of seven days, consecutively, there were 18 questions from the opposition on Medavie. Now that Bernard Lord, the former Conservative Premier, is CEO, there are no more questions. It shows just how political and partisan the opposition is.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, member.

Roads

Mr. Stewart: In Miramichi, for the last 30 years, paving Route 108, the Renous-Plaster Rock highway, has been a concern for Miramichiers. It is at the core of the city council, it is at the core of the Blackville, Doaktown, and Boiestown councils, and it is at the core of all the people, to build the tourism industry and, at the same time, to create a shorter route to Maine and to the north. Over the years, we have seen less winter maintenance and chipseal as opposed to asphalt.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. My question is this: Will you be looking at that highway over your tenure as minister of the department? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure certainly will want to get up and discuss this with the member opposite from the Miramichi.



However, if he is going to talk about the Miramichi, I would like the member opposite, while he is on his feet, to denounce the comments that his colleague made about the nursing home that will be built for the seniors of Miramichi and the region. To have the member opposite call it a warehouse was completely unacceptable.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The member opposite from the Miramichi knows that. I ask him to get on his feet today, for the record, here in the Legislature, to denounce the warehouse comment by his colleague.

Mr. Stewart: I find it to be preposterous that the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure is refusing to get on his feet. If the members opposite were getting the pipeline done, as they were supposed to, instead of pandering, they could run a spur line from Grand Falls to Belledune, build a brand new oil refinery in Belledune, and create 10 to 15 years of construction. That would pave that untarnished highway that we need in Miramichi.

I ask this today: Does the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure understand the higher principles and the higher importance of this highway? Will he get on his feet and answer the question?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure will certainly take the third question to get into the specifics; however, I cannot help but get up.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I love how the Energy East Pipeline project, with some random thought of the member of the opposition, will have some segue going to somewhere else in the province and that will make it so that we will be able to invest in roads and infrastructure. I cannot even fathom how the member opposite is making these connections.

However, I would like the member opposite, who wants to talk about the Miramichi, to address the real issue that we have heard in this Legislature over the last few days about the Miramichi, and that is the member from Moncton, who sits right behind the member opposite. He called the nursing home that will help the quality of life of the seniors in the Miramichi and in the region a warehouse. It was unacceptable as a comment. It should not have been made. The member opposite should apologize. I would at least think that the member from Miramichi would denounce those comments here on the floor right now.



Mr. Stewart: It is called vision, and it is called ideas. It is something that the members across the way are short on.

I will tell you, you could have a new oil refinery in Belledune. It has the deepest port. We invested in that. You could run a spur line from Grand Falls straight to Belledune and create 10 to 15 years of construction on the Route 108 highway and create another 15 years of construction by building a brand new oil refinery for countries, such as Italy, that cannot accept crude oil. There are countries that need finished product. We have the capability in New Brunswick.

I will ask this today: Will the Minister of Transportation get on his feet, join me in supporting this project, and prove that this is the department that Miramichiers have always wanted? Will he do his job for our region?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: We still have not heard from the member opposite on his comments about the warehouse situation.

I find it rather ironic that, during the four years that the member opposite was in the government, Route 108 was not even talked about. Zero dollars were spent on Route 108 during the four years that the member opposite was in government. I remember the four years that I was in the government, under the Liberal government, from 2006 to 2010. Millions of dollars were put on that highway, the Renous-Plaster Rock highway. Why, all of a sudden, is it a priority for the member now? The member should be getting up and saying thank you to the members and the ministers from Miramichi for the 240-bed, state-of-the-art nursing home for the Miramichi.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: There is the \$62.3 million that has been invested in education and in new schools in the Miramichi. There is the 96-bed special care and 3B home that will soon be starting in Miramichi, and there are countless other projects that I do not have time to list here today. The member should be ashamed of himself for getting up to criticize two ministers and a community that has made so much progress in the last four years.

Power Rate Increases

Mr. Coon: On Canada Day, our power rates went up. Yes, New Brunswick ratepayers continue to subsidize the large industrial operations in this province with their power bills through a program that is deceptively named the Large Industrial Renewable Energy Purchase Program. However, no energy is purchased by NB Power from this program. According to evidence that NB Power tabled with the Energy and Utilities Board, this amounted to \$38.8 million that we paid to heavy industry in this province in 2014-15, and we did not receive a kilowatt-hour of



power in return. Will the Minister of Energy and Resource Development undertake to end this giveaway to heavy industry in our province?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question, and I welcome his questions. As a matter of fact, I certainly look forward to the member opposite coming in to visit with the folks at NB Power to get an understanding or a grasp of what is taking place there.

As part of the revenue requirements going before the Energy and Utilities Board, there was a 1.63% increase that was granted for the power rates. However, the EUB had a look at the operations and felt that it should be 1.66%. The original request was 2%. The actual granted amount was a little bit lower than what came forward. However, we have to realize that, on the energy efficiency side, with time-of-day savings and the things that people can do, people could go onto the Web site to see what it is they could do to save. The power rates are going up by approximately \$4 per month, on average. NB Power is providing safe, affordable rates—the lowest in Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Coon: The deceptively named Large Industrial Renewable Energy Purchase Program does not put any power on NB Power's grid, renewable or otherwise. NB Power is paying for power that heavy industry self-generates for internal use, consuming it all behind the power meters. NB Power is not purchasing renewable power for its grid. It is giving a handout to heavy industry to subsidize its power costs, and the rest of us are paying for it. Our power rates go up.

The EUB says that it cannot touch that because it is public policy. It is in the *Electricity Act*. It is in regulation. The EUB cannot consider it when weighing whether or not to grant a power increase to NB Power. Only the minister could make the difference. Only the minister could remove or eliminate the Large Industrial Renewable Energy Purchase Program to save New Brunswick ratepayers \$30 million plus per year.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Once again, I invite the member opposite to come see the utility. My door is open, at any point. The olive branch is out to have a discussion about rates and about how everything works at NB Power.

The EUB had a job to do. As far as we are concerned and as far as I am concerned, the EUB did its job. We have the best power rates in the Maritimes. That has taken a lot of work by the individuals at NB Power, to work on their performance and their performance standards to try to keep the rates down as low as possible while, at the same time, paying down a degree of debt and, at the same time, investing in infrastructure improvements. It is also investing in areas such as tree trimming and moving the lines back.

A lot of work has gone into NB Power over the past number of years. We are supportive, and we are working with it. Objectively, the conversation that we really need to maintain...



Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: We are looking for answers from the minister in this House. When the former Alward government amended the *Electricity Act* to remit this massive handout to heavy industry, the member for Campbellton-Dalhousie was in opposition. During that debate, the member said that the Liberals were really concerned that residential customers and small business customers would be subsidizing large industrial customers through this program. He thought it was wrong. Well, he was right, and, until recently, the member was the Minister of Energy. However, this government has simply perpetuated this massive subsidy to heavy industry. How does the Minister of Energy and Resource Development justify prolonging such a subsidy at the expense of ordinary New Brunswick ratepayers?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Just to reiterate the fact, we have the lowest rates in the Maritimes. I think that speaks volumes. The Energy and Utilities Board did its job. Originally, it was 1.63%, and it changed it to 1.66% based on the revenue requirements that NB Power had.

To the member opposite, my door is open to have some discussions about rates and about how the system works. If we look at the corporation, it maintains one of North America's most diverse generating systems of 12 hydro, coal, oil, or diesel power generating stations. Some 75% of our in-province load is provided by these systems. NB Power also operates and maintains a CANDU with 660-MW service out of Point Lepreau. NB Power has been doing its job, working to remove costs from the operation and working with the EUB so that we can have the lowest rates in the Maritimes.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Ferry Service

Mr. Wetmore: Almost immediately, the people of my riding began to feel the impact of the loss of the Gagetown ferry. Everyone, including farmers, small businesses, and tourists, is hoping that the new Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure will reverse this poor decision. Has the minister studied any reports on the impact of the Gagetown ferry on communities on both sides of the Saint John River since taking on this portfolio?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We know that tough choices had to be made if we were going to succeed in getting New Brunswick's fiscal situation back on track. One of the tough choices that was made relates to the Gagetown ferry. Replacing the ferry would cost \$5 million. The former minister went through the Strategic Program Review process, and our government went through the Strategic Program Review process. We have had to make difficult choices. The former minister was very clear on the decision that was made, and we are not going to be looking at that decision again. The decision was made, and it is time to move on. Thank you.



Mr. Wetmore: Unfortunately, the minister did not hear my question. My question was this: Did the minister have the opportunity to study any reports?

As part of the Strategic Program Review exercise, members of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure's Planning and Strategic Development Branch started work on an economic evaluation of the ferries on the Saint John River. Can the minister tell the House why they were told to stop this study?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: Again, we understand the concern, and we understand that, when tough choices are made, people are not going to be happy with some of those decisions. We, as a government, went through an extensive review process with the Strategic Program Review in our first year and a half. We made many difficult choices to get our fiscal house in order. This was one of those difficult choices that had to be made. It is time for us to move on. The former minister was very clear on the decision that was made, and all the questions were answered at that time. It is not something that I plan to revisit.

Mr. Wetmore: Again, it is very, very unfortunate that the new Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure has not answered either of the first two questions that were asked of him, and that is not surprising. This government did not do an economic study on the impacts of the ferry. It just made a decision to close it.

I understand that DTI is a big portfolio and that we all have only 24 hours in our day. I do not want to make any requests that would be unreasonable. I know that the minister understands how important tourism is to our province through his experience with his previous portfolio. Today, I would like to ask the minister, with his new portfolio, whether he will commit to doing a socioeconomic evaluation of ferries on the Lower Saint John River.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are working very hard to achieve the objectives we have set with New Brunswickers. Our goal is to grow our economy, but also to turn our public finances around so that investments can be made in New Brunswickers' priorities, education and, of course, health.

Yes, tough choices had to be made, and we made them. We are going to continue to work with New Brunswickers to make the best possible investments to achieve our common objectives.

[Original]

However, what I do not understand is why there were five member's statements about electoral reform and not one question came from the opposition. It is very troubling. If the opposition members would have a dialogue and a discussion instead of running—sprinting—into a scrum to say that they oppose the electoral reform and that they will not be part of the committee...



Why will they not take the time to discuss it with us, even here during question period, if necessary? They would know that we are not seeking the majority on the committee. They would know that the discussion is open-ended and that we want them to be involved. They would know that it would be nonpartisan, as New Brunswickers want and deserve.

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

