

March 30, 2017

[Original]

Parlee Beach Provincial Park

Mr. Higgs: Well, yet again, CBC reports this morning more devastating news with regard to Parlee Beach. The Department of Environment says that there is a walking trail built in violation of the *Clean Environment Act* on the Health Minister's proposed mega campground in Shediac. Beyond that, it is also reported that, while he was Leader of the Opposition, the Health Minister informed the Department of Environment of his intention to relocate the walking trail on the edge of the campground to connect it to Parlee Beach. In light of this latest information, what is the Premier prepared to do? When does this end? When do we get this correct? When do we make it right for the citizens of this province? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Like everyone else in this room, I read the article. One of the first things that I noticed—and I think that the opposition members should read it—is that it says the landowner is the Anglican Parish of Shediac. The landowner is the Anglican Parish of Shediac. Furthermore, I would like to clarify that article because, in fact, what happened was that this permit for this trail was first issued on August 15, 2014. It was issued on August 15, 2014. If the opposition has some information to give us on what happened then, I would be more than interested to learn about it.

Property Tax

Mr. Higgs: We will certainly be talking more about the Parlee Beach scandal. You can rest assured of that, that this will continue in the days to come. It is interesting that the Premier refuses to speak on these issues. The Premier has several attack dogs, absolutely. We have the Minister of Environment, who continues to get up to speak on any topic—any topic.

This is one last chance for the Premier—not the Environment Minister nor the Minister of Service New Brunswick nor any other member of the government side. For the Premier, and only the Premier, I will offer one last chance to do the right thing. Will the Premier act upon the wishes of New Brunswickers and extend the deadline for the property tax assessment appeals? Will the Premier do this today, or have his strategists assured him that this issue will go away as the House rises and the Premier avoids question period for the next three weeks? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Refuses to speak? I was criticized last week and the week before for getting up in place of the ministers. That is in Hansard. We can show that to the Leader of the Opposition, if he wants.

He is giving me one last chance. Is he the sheriff in town? Who does he think he is, to talk to the people of New Brunswick like that—to talk to the people, all 49 of us, who were elected to



represent the people of our province? Who is he in the opposition to make all these jokes about my family dog, my 7-year-old, 80-lb dog named Blaze?

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We, as the elected officials of the people of New Brunswick, deserve to have a good debate in this province and to have a good debate in the Legislature. The people of our province deserve to have their elected officials raise the level of debate, not do what the opposition is doing with its personal attacks, its sarcasm, and its condescending tone.

Mr. Higgs: There is never an answer and never even an indication of what the question is. It is just deflect, attack, try to create a whole different storyline, try to repeat whatever and hope that will stick, and try every day to do something but answer the real issues.

I have asked numerous times, and I will ask this again. We have been hearing of unbelievable increases to the assessments and tax bills of many campgrounds. We have documented proof of these. Will the Minister of Service New Brunswick provide the House with the net total increase of tax dollars taken from the campgrounds? I am asking the Minister of Service New Brunswick. I know that the Premier will stand up on issues. I will ask the Minister of Service New Brunswick, who will not stand up on issues. The Minister of Environment will probably stand up on this issue. What has been the overall increase taken from campgrounds around the province this year solely due to assessment increases? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The first question was answered, and the Leader of the Opposition got up to criticize me for not standing up on the first question. Then I got up on the second question, and he wanted me to sit down so that he could talk to another minister.

The Leader of the Opposition has degraded the level of debate in this Legislature to a whole new low. I would ask him to talk to his caucus, and I will do the same. I will do the same. We do not have white gloves either. Let's work together to raise the level of debate. I would like the Leader of the Opposition to get up and say that he sincerely thinks that it is cool and funny and that it is productive in moving our province forward to have the members of his caucus make jokes about my dog, Blaze.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As they laugh.

I think that the people of New Brunswick put us in this Legislature to talk about the economy and to talk about how we are going to give good education to our children and how we are going to give strong health care to our families, not to make personal attacks, even including attacks on the families of the members of this Legislature.



Mr. Higgs: I think that some of the courses must be having an effect. The Premier has slowed down his delivery. He has certainly calmed down the rhetoric, in a sense. He repeats the same story, but he just does it in a different tone. I am not sure that changes the message of no content. I am not sure that changes the message that the answers are not given. I think that it is just a different way, a different style, to say the same thing and hope that it has a different result.

Surely by now, someone on the government side has taken notice of the fact that we repeat questions to get an answer and to understand the total new tax revenue that has been generated from these increased assessments. Surely, someone got Service New Brunswick to calculate how much more tax revenue is coming in as a result of these assessment increases. How much more money is this government taking out of the income of New Brunswickers? That is a simple question. I just want to know the dollar figure. I know that this government is very capable of spending every last dime, but I think that New Brunswickers should know just how many dimes are included.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition says he is not getting answers. He asked us to extend the appeal deadline. He is asking for this again today and is saying he is not getting answers. If he wants, I will be pleased to find him exactly everything that has been said here in the House over the last few weeks. The Leader of the Opposition would then see that the Minister of Environment and Local Government answered this question several times. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition would see that it is not that he is not getting answers, but, actually, that he is asking the same questions, because he is trying to score political points.

[Original]

If the Leader of the Opposition wants to get up, lecture us, and be the sheriff in town about answering questions, I think that he should answer some questions. Let's start off with the fact that, in fact, the permit for the trail that he is talking about was issued on August 15, 2014. Would he, as he was the Minister of Finance, have information that would be helpful for New Brunswickers to know?

Mr. Higgs: I think that, in the spirit of cooperation, it would be good to do an analysis of the questions asked in the House and the answers given. I would be prepared to be judged by that. Let's have... It is question period, and we do ask the questions. I think that is the basic, fundamental philosophy. I would be very prepared to list all the questions asked, look at the answers given, and have an independent review of whether there was an answer given or there was a deflection given.



The issue of the bureaucrats overriding our own provincial assessors and raising people's assessments has not been answered. What is going on? We have the actual case—the paperwork and everything—and yet neither the minister, the substitute minister, nor the Premier, none of them, have addressed this or even acknowledged that it has happened. Has the Premier looked into this matter, and will he explain what is going on with this bureaucratic interference? We have a precise example, with the details, the property, and the individuals. I just want an answer for them. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: The Leader of the Opposition is very well aware that a review process and an appeal process are in place.

[*Original*]

I will use my second language to say this. In New Brunswick, 2013 was a year, in the last few years, when an increase of more than 10% was the highest. There were 36 090 increases of more than 10%. What exactly were the Tory government and the then Minister of Finance saying? The minister was defending the numbers and saying this: The value of their homes is going up; it is also a good thing.

What happened? Why was this such a good thing? We never said that it was a good thing. We have said that people had the right to appeal and we will be respecting that right. However, why was it a fair and equitable system when the Leader of the Opposition was minister? Why was it fair to say...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Higgs: Once again, a specific question and no answer—deflection. It is a pattern that has gone on for question period after question period because that is the only way to answer the questions—do not answer the questions.

Given the fact that tomorrow is the deadline and there is no extension in sight... Maybe at the last minute, the Premier will have a change of heart and do the right thing for this province and its residents, but it does not look as though that will happen. Yet we still have not received an answer on the issue of the yellow forms. Many people submitted those thinking that they might be the appeal forms. They were included in this year's assessment. Those forms only added confusion to an already upsetting situation for those who saw big increases in their assessments and their tax bills.

Many people reported sending in only those yellow forms, believing they were appealing their assessments. What is the government going to do about this? How many of these forms have been submitted, and, in the interest of doing the right thing for the people of this province, will



they be treated as appeals, given the fact that the deadline is approaching and is unlikely to change? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I see there is in fact a lot of confusion, but it is all in the head of the Leader of the Opposition.

So, I will ask my question again, because we are doing our job, we have been very transparent, and we have said that errors were made. In 2013, the assessments of more than 36 000 houses in New Brunswick increased by more than 10%. This was the worst year, so why were the property assessment increases a good thing that year, according to the Leader of the Opposition? Why, in 2014, after the previous government had just had four years with, on average, 9 000 errors, was the system fair and equitable according to the former Minister of Finance? Yes, confusion reigns, and it is clear where it reigns.

[*Original*]

Parlee Beach Provincial Park

Mr. B. Macdonald: The issue that we have on this side of the House is that the Minister of Health owns a campground at Parlee Beach and the Premier personally chose him to be responsible for public health at Parlee Beach and there has always been a direct link between water quality at Parlee Beach and the ability of this minister to develop that campground. That, to me, is a clear conflict. There is certainly a clear perception of conflict.

For weeks and potentially months, the Premier has defended this minister, and the basis of his defense has been that the commissioner established that there is no conflict. But I have read the commissioner's letter, and that is not what it says, so I would like the Premier to quote for us exactly where the commissioner has established unequivocally that there is no conflict in this case. What does the Premier cite as evidence, other than the word of the minister who is in conflict, that there is no conflict as established by the commissioner?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As has been stated several times with regard to this file, the Minister of Health consulted the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, who, in fact, indicated that the Minister of Health did not have a conflict. However, the minister was informed that the committee we established to review the file could make a recommendation to stop development in the Parlee Beach area for a specific period.

So, because of this potential recommendation, the commissioner told the Minister of Health that he, in fact, did not have a conflict, but that there could be a perception of conflict.



Therefore, the commissioner advised the minister to recuse himself from the file, and this is what he did.

[Original]

I have to say that the member opposite has to stop saying that the Minister of Health owns a campground. That is just not the case.

Mr. B. Macdonald: What the minister does own is an entity called Camping Shediac Camping, so I am not sure whether or not that is a campground. It sounds a lot like a campground to me. However, the issue is that it is actually not a campground. The whole issue here, which the Premier is missing, is the developing of that land into a campground, and the crucial part of developing that land into a campground is the quality of water. This minister was responsible for ensuring that this was adequately reported, and he has failed in that task.

Now, it is the Premier who makes the decision on who gets appointed, but the Premier seems to know a lot about the business affairs of this minister. My understanding was that the minister's assets were in a blind trust, yet the Premier seems to know whether or not it is a campground, which is not clear to me. If it is in a blind trust, that is very interesting to me.

My question for the Premier is this: Has the Premier been in conflict here? Has the Premier disclosed his dealings with the Minister of Health to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner? Has he done legal work for the Minister of Health? Has he been involved in property transactions for the Minister of Health? Has he been the...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition said that he will do things differently. He certainly is. He is doing things differently and bringing down the level of debate to a whole new low. I am actually a member of the bar. I am nonpracticing, so I do not appreciate the accusations that I was doing any legal work for anyone actually at this point. I am not providing legal advice to anyone.

How do I know that it is not a campground? Well, I actually went to play kickball on the fields in the area of Parlee Beach where this land that we are talking about is situated. I went this summer. I know that there is no campground there. If the member opposite wants to take a drive this weekend, he can go see with his own eyes whether or not there is a campground present there.

Again, we have answered these questions numerous times. The Conflict of Interest Commissioner has been consulted throughout the file and has given the advice that the minister should now recuse himself, and that is exactly what our government has done.



Mr. B. Macdonald: Well, as a lawyer, the Premier knows that, once you are a lawyer, you are always a lawyer. My question was very clear to the Premier. What legal work has the Premier done for the Minister of Health? Has the Premier, as a lawyer, served the Minister of Health on property transactions? It is a very clear question.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have a few things. Number one, I am not going to talk about any files that I ever would have had. That is inappropriate. Again, “once you are a lawyer, you are always a lawyer” is a bit of a weird statement.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Riverview will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The MLA for Rothesay could clarify, I am sure, that I am a member of the bar. I am nonpracticing. I have been nonpracticing for quite some time now, and I suggest that the member opposite take note of the answer because it is common practice. Again, the member for Rothesay can attest to that.

[*Translation*]

What is important is that, in this process, the Minister of Health always consulted the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. The commissioner very clearly told the minister that he did not have a conflict, but that, because of recent developments, there could be a perception of conflict. So, the commissioner advised the minister to recuse himself from the file, and this is the decision we made as a government.

[*Original*]

Property Tax

Mr. Wetmore: The Gallant government’s widespread property tax assessment mess gets messier every day. Now, there are petitions circulating at apartment buildings. After what happened with the petition with 11 000 signatures from the Miramichi, I would suggest that, if people want to be sure that their petition gets tabled right here in the Legislature properly, openly, and honestly, they contact me at the opposition office.

I also expect that more will be heard from the owners of park model trailers. I am hearing from many upset owners. Can the minister tell the House how much of an overall increase these park models have experienced this year?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I heard the member opposite talk about a petition in the Miramichi, so I feel that it is appropriate to get up and set the record straight. The members opposite keep speaking about a petition. Yes, I received a petition in June of last year. The people who came to my office with the petition said: Here is the petition. I said: What would you like me to do



with it? Do you want me to hold this until the Legislature resumes in November, or would you like me to present it to the Premier and the Cabinet? They said very clearly: Present it to the Premier and the Cabinet. That is exactly what I did, two days after I was presented with the petition. A response was issued by Social Development. The response was given back to the people who had given me the petition. That is the status of the petition.

The member opposite keeps talking about a petition from Gagetown as well. He is doing his community a real disservice because we are working extremely hard to help his community. He should stop trying to bring his community down and start working for the people who elected him, as he should.

Mr. Wetmore: September 2018 will show these people how well this side of the House is working for the people.

Some of these park model trailers were built back in the nineties and have had their assessments hiked to well over the purchase price of a brand-new model. RV retailers tell me that these trailers depreciate. They do not increase in value. How does the minister justify something that is worth \$5 000 at fair market value being assessed at \$45 000? Can the minister explain what makes that possible? New Brunswickers would like to understand the reasoning.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I just want to take this opportunity to clarify this for the member opposite. He should ask his leader, the former Minister of Finance, what he thinks about the Gagetown ferry. I had a call from his leader two days before Mel Norton announced in Gagetown that, if he became the Premier... The member opposite was a supporter of Mel Norton, and he stood there on the dock with Mel Norton when he announced that he would bring back the Gagetown ferry if he became Premier. The Leader of the Opposition called me the night before that announcement to ask me about the facts around the Gagetown ferry. He said: You are doing the right thing; it was the right decision.

I think that the member opposite might want to clarify with the Leader of the Opposition where he stands instead of going out there and making all these statements to try to bring his community down and instead of working for his community, as we do on this side of the House. It is disgraceful.

Mr. Wetmore: The only things that are disgraceful are the actions of the members on the government side.

I have been contacted about bills more than doubling or tripling—some have increased nine times over—on these park model trailers. People on a fixed income just do not take hits like that without it coming from somewhere. Government is supposed to make life better for the middle class, but this government never learned that lesson. Homeowners, apartment dwellers, campgrounds—you name it—have been hit and hit hard with tax bills increasing by frightening amounts. The way that this government spends money makes it even more insulting. As a



group, how much of a percentage increase were these park model trailers hit with? Does the minister know that answer?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to address some of the comments made by the member opposite with regard to the middle class. Our government is working very hard to help families across this province. That is why, as a government, we are focused on economic growth. That is why we have invested more than any other government in the history of our province in education. That is why we are investing record amounts in health care to improve services for families across the province. We are doing all of that while reducing the deficit by half.

We have done things to help the middle class. We have done things to help families across the province, such as raising the minimum wage. The opposition did not support that. We did things such as enhancing the CPP by working with the Trudeau government. The opposition did not support that. Since we have been the government, we have cut the small business tax by 33%. We have given the most lucrative HST rebate to those who need help. Again, the opposition opposed our free tuition program for those that need it most.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[*Translation*]

Public Transportation System

Mr. Coon: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Owning a car is not possible for a significant number of New Brunswickers. If you cannot afford to buy one, getting to the doctor's office, getting to work, or even travelling to visit your family can be a real challenge.

Public transportation is an essential public service. The federal government made a commitment to invest \$20 billion to improve public transportation over the next 11 years. My question is this: Did the minister receive a mandate from the Premier to negotiate funds in order to provide efficient public transportation services for New Brunswickers?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I want to thank the member opposite for a very valid question and a very legitimate question. I am very pleased to stand to say that we value what he does. Public transit is very important. What I can say is that I have had many meetings with Minister Sohi, the federal Minister of Infrastructure in regard to transit infrastructure. In fact, I was very proud to be part of many announcements last year when we invested in transit in Miramichi, we invested in transit in Fredericton, and we invested in transit in Saint John as well. With respect to the new infrastructure dollars that are in place, those details are still being worked out, but I am very confident that we will have more infrastructure dollars that we can spend to keep developing transit here in our province because it is the right thing to do.



Mr. Coon: Part of the solution is certainly rail. I was glad to hear that the minister had met with VIA Rail President and CEO Yves Desjardins-Siciliano in early March. The federal government has budgeted \$867 million for VIA Rail over the next three years, so this is a real opportunity for New Brunswick to revive rail as a public transportation option for New Brunswickers. Can the minister tell the House about the results of that meeting?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: Another very legitimate question, and I commend the member opposite for bringing those types of questions to the House because they are important to New Brunswickers.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I would be very happy to update the member opposite. I might not be able to do it in a minute. I have had several meetings with Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, the President of VIA Rail.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Member.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: In fact, I met with him two weeks ago in Montreal to talk with VIA about this very important issue. In fact, I met with the President of CN on a number of occasions, as well as the executive at CN, including just two weeks ago. We have CN officials coming to New Brunswick in the next couple of weeks to have another meeting with a team that I put in place. It consists of senior executives from RDC, ONB, the Department of Energy and Resource Development, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, and the Premier's Office, because we know how serious rail is and how important it is to our province. We are going to continue to work with CN and VIA both to make sure that we can provide the best services, not only for VIA but also for the transportation of our goods and services in our province. Thank you.

Mr. Coon: New Brunswick remains heavily dependent on personal vehicles, which, of course, create excessive carbon pollution. Our overdependence on driving stands in the way of the Premier's achieving his carbon pollution reduction targets for 2020 and 2030. The establishment of effective and seamless public transportation services would serve the province's social, economic, and environmental objectives. This does require investment from Ottawa and from New Brunswick, but it also requires a plan to provide this needed public service to New Brunswickers.

Will the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure table his plan to make public transportation a public service accessible to New Brunswickers?



Hon. Mr. Fraser: Again, I commend the member opposite for bringing up subjects in this House that are of particular interest and are very important to the people of New Brunswick. We are working extremely hard with CN and with VIA on that file. We are also working on electric vehicles and other initiatives. I would be happy to sit down with the member opposite to discuss those plans further and discuss how we can work together to achieve the results that we want to achieve here in New Brunswick.

I mentioned this during the estimates process for my department. We are purchasing an electric bus, which will be the first electric bus in the province. Our government is putting that in place in this coming school year. In fact, another meeting I had when I was in Montreal was with another company that distributes electric vehicles for different transportation modes, and we are looking at possibly looking at some of our fleet to see whether we can turn some of those vehicles into electric to help the environment and to help with the carbon footprint.

Recycling

Mr. K. MacDonald: Today is a big day for the government's electronic recycling program. New Brunswickers have been notified by advertising flyers about what products are included. The big questions that remain are, one, what will this cost the taxpayers, and, two, where do we take our electronic recyclables?

When one visits the Recycle NB site and clicks on the link "Where to Recycle" and "Electronics", it says: Coming soon. Let's hope there are some answers coming soon as well. Can the minister tell us today how many retailers in our province will be impacted by this program? As we know, retailers will be collecting this new hidden tax. How many electronics retailers do we have across New Brunswick?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: It seems that the member opposite is not looking in the same places as I am, because, an hour before coming to the House this morning, I had a look, and I found a fairly long list of all the retailers. So, if the member cannot find the information on the Internet, I can perhaps give him the list I have here. I can tell you that many retailers are listed.

That being said, I would like to clarify that this program is very important for the environment and that we are proud of it. It is a program that has its place in our province. In fact, with regard to protecting the environment, we know that electronic waste is a big part of our lives. So, a government of action, a government that moves things forward, absolutely had to do its job. As with all other files, we did our job, and we are proud of it.

[*Original*]

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

