

December 8, 2017

[Original]

Property Tax

Mr. Higgs: On page 10 of the Auditor General’s Special Examination, we read: “Exchanges between the Premier’s Chief of Staff and the SNB’s former CEO led to Fast Track.” There is the starting point identified by the Auditor General in her report.

It is disingenuous to suggest that the Auditor General reported that the Premier did not order the fast track. The Auditor General has not been able to prove that the Premier ordered the fast track. There is a world of difference between complete innocence and not getting caught. Basically, the Auditor General did not see the Premier with his hand in the cookie jar, but he has crumbs all over his face.

We want to know and we want the people of this province to know that they can believe the Premier, but somebody is not being square with the public. Is it the Premier, or is it his Chief of Staff? Thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: The quotes that are being used—and I am quoting the Auditor General—are “fictional” conversations. I am quoting her again: “These communications are not direct quotes and incorrectly imply the Premier requested “Fast Track”.”

Last week, in front of the committee, she answered this question from the MLA for Gagetown-Petitcodiac: “Are you certain the Premier’s Chief of Staff did not order the fast tracking”. The Auditor General answered: “Based on the evidence ... that is not what happened.” The Auditor General cannot be clearer than that.

[Translation]

I will take advantage of the time I have left to say that we are a government that will finally resolve the situation. We are not the government with the Minister of Finance who said, after 35 000 errors, that the system was fair and just. We will work to get a system that is truly fair and just.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: On page 34, it says this:

Upon review of the evidence gathered,

This is, again, from the Auditor General’s report.



AGNB could not determine the Premier requested “Fast Track”, although it was clear the demonstration and subsequent follow up by the Premier’s Office contributed to SNB’s perceived sense of urgency in implementing aerial photography.

Once again, we have the statements coming from the Premier’s Office. We are not saying it is the Premier or it is the Chief of Staff because they have conflicting stories. That is why we cannot point to one or the other. That is why the Auditor General could not do it as well. However, due to these conflicting statements, we would like to know which one is telling the facts. Which one is clear, because they are different? In March 2017, the Premier found out. In May of the previous year, 2016, the Premier’s Chief of Staff said he told the Premier. Which one is real? They both cannot be correct. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: The Leader of the Opposition wants to know which version is real, then. If I understand correctly, this is the big question of the day.

The Auditor General said that the Premier was never informed of this fast track issue on May 6, 2016. She said that this was not part of the presentation to the Premier; Service New Brunswick employees have confirmed this. Therefore, the Auditor General did indeed say that the presentation made to the Premier did not actually deal with the fast-track procedure.

The Leader of the Opposition is saying the opposite, so I will ask him the same question he is asking us: Which one is real?

Mr. Higgs: The Attorney General has spent eight days casting doubt on his own credibility during question period. Did the Premier or another Cabinet member not tell the Attorney General about the May 6, 2016, presentation? Did they let him rise in the House each day to present the partisan view of the government without knowing the facts? Will the Premier answer this question? While he is standing, will he tell New Brunswickers whom they are to believe, him or his Chief of Staff?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I want to reassure the Leader of the Opposition: As Minister of Service New Brunswick and Attorney General, I have no problem with my credibility.

That is why I will continue to say that, since 2011, many errors have been made in the provincial property tax assessment system. We are talking about thousands and thousands of errors here. When the opposition was in government, from 2010 to 2014, it accepted 35 000 errors without hesitation. At that time, according to the Leader of the Opposition, who was Minister of Finance then, the system was fair and just.

Right now, I am much more worried about the Leader of the Opposition than about myself, as Attorney General. I am worried about him, because even though we have certainly been having



problems at Service New Brunswick for seven months, he has yet to make a suggestion. The Leader of the Opposition must still believe that the system is fair and just.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: The Auditor General pointed out very clearly that this past year was a record one by any stretch of the imagination, with more errors and more appeals than ever before—more appeals by a factor of two than ever before. We are not talking about mistakes. We are talking about fraudulent bills that were purposely sent out to citizens of this province. Fraudulent bills—that is what we are talking about.

Page 33 of the Auditor General’s report reads:

It is clear the demonstration to the Premier and subsequent exchanges between the Premier’s Chief of Staff and SNB’s former CEO started the chain of events that led to “Fast Track”.

This is on page 33.

Critical conversations occurred via phone calls.

Via phone calls. I wonder why.

During interviews, AGNB received conflicting accounts of the content of those phone calls.

If that is not an illustration that she could not get to the bottom of this because people were not telling all the facts... That is why we have the subpoena. That is why we need the people in the Legislature. Will the minister finally agree?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I have said this several times this week, but I will repeat it again: It is discouraging, embarrassing even, that the Leader of the Opposition will not accept the findings of the Auditor General. She was very clear on this.

[Original]

She said that there were no outstanding issues and no mysteries.

[Translation]

It seems that doubt remains only in the minds of the Leader of the Opposition and of opposition members. I will therefore keep on repeating this: We finally have a government of



action that is ready to fix the problems found by the Auditor General. The Auditor General made 25 important recommendations. After spending six or seven months on a comprehensive review, she told us this: Here is what needs to be done to resolve the situation. We will work on these 25 recommendations and we will fully implement them. Once again, I am asking the opposition to get serious and work with us to fix the situation.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: Implementing the Auditor General's recommendations has not been a strong suit of this government, and that has been demonstrated over and over again.

I will go back to page 33. I want to ask the minister this, since the Premier is not responding. I expect that in the last 30 seconds, maybe he will respond.

It is clear the demonstration to the Premier and subsequent exchanges between the Premier's Chief of Staff and SNB's former CEO started the chain of events that led to "Fast Track".

That is a pretty bold statement. There is no confusion in that statement. That is in the Auditor General's report, on page 33.

Critical conversations occurred via phone calls. During interviews, AGNB received conflicting accounts of the content of those phone calls.

All I would like is for the minister or the Premier to comment specifically on the interpretation of what the Auditor General is clearly saying on page 33.

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: What the Auditor General is clearly stating is what the Leader of the Opposition is referring to, a "fictional conversation". I am quoting the Auditor General here: "these communications are not direct quotes and incorrectly imply the Premier requested "Fast Track"."

It is clear. There are no outstanding issues, no mysteries, as she said. Let's get to work. Let's make a real solution, and let's put the 25 recommendations into effect to make sure that there are no more errors—no more 35 000 errors, as the opposition had when it was in power. Let's finish with all these errors. It is time to get to work.

Mr. Higgs: It is obvious that we are not on the same page—page 33 of the Auditor General's report.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Mr. Higgs: It is clear. I am not bouncing all around. I am talking about page 33, and it is very focused.

It is clear the demonstration to the Premier and subsequent exchanges between the Premier's Chief of Staff and SNB's former CEO started the chain of events that led to "Fast Track".

There is no confusion there. It is very clear. I would like the minister to reference that particular document.

If we look at the organizational chart, we find that there is a reference that the Chief Executive Officer reported to the minister. I know that previously the Minister of Service New Brunswick was not allowed to speak on this front. Would it be possible today for that previous minister to actually speak on that front, to actually say what involvement he had? His voice was not heard in the Auditor General's report. Where was he during that, and why was the minister who is speaking now speaking constantly before?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I am glad to hear that the Leader of the Opposition wants me to speak more. I will do that with a lot of pleasure.

Also, I have to say that this is certainly the first time that I completely agree with the Leader of the Opposition. We are not on the same page. That is quite clear. We are not on the same page because we are on the page of finding solutions, not making political gains, as he has been trying to do since the beginning of the week.

[*Translation*]

It is time to take action, then, and to find solutions to the problem at Service New Brunswick, once and for all. The Auditor General submitted a comprehensive and independent report to us. She could have called witnesses and had them testify under oath; however, since everybody cooperated so well, she did not have to do this. She submitted 25 recommendations to us, which we must implement, and this is what we will do in order to move forward.

[*Original*]

Mr. Higgs: The only page that the minister is on is the page of continual cover-up. Take note of the Attorney General's talking points that he has been faithfully reciting this week—or any week, because they are all the same. They have changed a great deal from those talking points that he was instructed to deliver in the month of March, however, before the whistle-blower discredited them. So we will change based on the need to force change, at the time. Back in March, there was no issue, according to the Attorney General, but we learned that he was not telling the reality of the situation. Maybe he did not know, but he should have.



Did the Premier tell the Attorney General what was really going on, or did the Attorney General not want to know? Either way, the Attorney General's credibility has to be used to shield the Premier. Will the Premier get up and tell us whether the Attorney General was advised of the reality? Also, while he is up, will he tell the people of New Brunswick whom to believe—him or the Chief of Staff? Or, will he agree to follow through and bring in the four individuals who can tell us under oath exactly what happened? Then, we move on. Thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I said it many times this week. The one person that we have to believe is the Auditor General. There is no doubt about that. Having said that...

[*Translation*]

Having said that, it must simply be recognized that, yes, there are problems at Service New Brunswick. Indeed, there were 35 000 property assessment errors from 2010 to 2014, and thousands of errors were also made after that.

The opposition wanted an independent report from the Auditor General. We have received this report, and, in it, it is very clearly indicated that everything that needed to be figured out was, and that no mystery remains. So, now it is time to move on to solutions and to implement the 25 excellent recommendations provided by the Auditor General. I am asking the Leader of the Opposition to accept this independent and comprehensive report and to respect this legislative officer.

[*Original*]

Health Care Services

Mr. B. Macdonald: Well, the Gallant government is rapidly closing in on its self-imposed January 1 deadline to ram through the sole-sourced extra-mural contract to Medavie. The government still has the option to do the right thing. It can stop this process and open extra-mural services to a fair, open, transparent, and competitive process. My question today to the Premier is this: Has the government received any indication that there are companies other than Medavie that are willing and able to compete for the extra-mural contract?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I find the question quite ironic when we know that the New Brunswick Drug Plan was sole-sourced to Medavie by the previous government. I would ask the same questions to the member opposite. Why did his government go with Medavie without competing? I would ask the previous government members the same questions that he was asking me. The answer is quite clear.

Medavie has proven that it can provide quality service—a New Brunswick-based solution, with a not-for-profit organization based in New Brunswick that has proven how it provides quality home care services—both home care delivery services and ambulance services. Medavie is top-



notch in the country and top-notch around the world, and we are proud to partner with it. We will continue to do so, and we are proud of the work that we will produce with it. The results will be provided through the key performance indicators. With Medavie, we can do it and we will.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Well, unbeknownst to the government, the point of question period is to hold it accountable and responsible for its decisions, so our questions are for the government of the day.

I would remind the government of its record. It has chosen to sole-source a 10-year contract to Ambulance New Brunswick and to renew without competition a contract that contains some serious, fundamental flaws that are keeping ambulances off the roads of this province. It is now about to offer up another sole-sourced 10-year contract for the Extra-Mural Program. That is its record, so I will ask this again. Has the government received any indication from any companies that believe they could compete for this Medavie Extra-Mural Program contract, or does it feel compelled to make the contract sole-sourced?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I appreciate the question because I have said this over and over again during committee meetings. Obviously, we clearly stated in the February 2016 budget speech that we were starting discussions with Medavie regarding possible integration of services. For the time period of a year and a half, no one showed up at our door with a counterproposal or with other alternate solutions. As Minister of Health, I can say that we do get solicited by private companies and also by public entities about providing other types of solutions. We get that all the time in our department, yet we did not get a single person coming in during the one-and-a-half-year period of time between February 2016 and September 2017 to provide other solutions. So, no, we have not had any.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Just so you know, the entire world has a standardized procedure for procurement, and that does not include a speech from the throne. It includes such things as a letter of intent, a letter of interest, or a request for proposal. Those are the standard mechanisms that are used in procurement by all governments around the world and by the government of New Brunswick to solicit responses from bidders. I have asked the minister about this in committee. He has had the opportunity to review it, and he knows it very well. He cannot hide behind a statement that was made a year and a half ago in a speech from the throne. There is a process in place.

My question stands, then. The minister has indicated a year-and-a-half period from when it was mentioned in the speech from the throne. What about since then? Has the minister or this government now received, at any point, any indication from a company that shows that it is willing and able to compete for the Medavie contract? It is a simple question. Have you received anything from any company that says that it could compete now?



Hon. Mr. Bourque: Well, as I mentioned, they had a year and a half to do it. If they were going to do it, they would have and they did not.

The other thing that I want to mention is that we are fully, fully compliant with the *Procurement Act* of New Brunswick. Yes, the member opposite is right. There is such a process, and we in government are following it to the letter, just as the members opposite did when they sole-sourced the New Brunswick Drug Plan to Medavie. I do not see the problem here. They did it, and we are doing it. They were fully compliant with the law, and we are fully compliant with the law.

We feel that Medavie is a fantastic partner that will allow us to provide better-quality home care services to New Brunswickers. With more visits and less time in emergency rooms while maintaining the quality of care, New Brunswickers will be way better served with this partnership.

Mr. Northrup: It is a pleasure to rise without having just a minute left to go, when the Premier has been scripted to say what he wants to say in that last minute. Having 10 minutes to go, I hope that I will get some answers to my questions.

Now that the emergency medical technicians (EMTs) will be making house calls sometime in January, how will they be moved around in the area? If a call comes in while they are in the middle of a procedure in someone's house, how will this interfere with their job? Has the Premier or the minister even thought about this while trying to fast-track this new agreement? Can the government once again guarantee the same excellent service that the extra-mural nurses perform? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I appreciate the questions. Once again, the fearmongering is alive and well from the members opposite. To imply that starting in January, EMTs will be going into houses is not accurate. That will be done eventually, but they have a few years to start going there. That will be done with a lot of consultation, through a concerted effort with all the health professionals, including paramedics and the staff of the Extra-Mural Program. All of that will be done in a gradual way, and it will be done in a seamless way. We will ensure the quality to patients, and it will not interfere with emergency response times.

We are talking about community paramedicine where you have paramedics who, for various reasons, cannot perform first-response duties but can do community paramedicine. By doing that, we will be able to do these types of interventions. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: I am not here to fearmonger at all. I am here to voice the concerns of the parents of disabled children. I am here to voice the concerns of the seniors who have been calling this side of the House and, I am sure, that side of the House with regard to the communications aspect of this whole thing. The communications aspect has been just terrible. There is no other way to describe it other than Terrible, with a capital T. The communications



plan has been terrible. When will this Premier or this minister roll out the communications plan and say that everything will stay the same on January 1, 2018? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I am glad that was raised by the member opposite. We have been putting that message out, but the opposition has been mostly going against that communications plan and fearmongering with the population, saying all the bad things that are going to happen through this partnership.

I am here to reassure the population of New Brunswick and to say that, starting January 1, everything will remain the same. It will be seamless. You will have the same level of quality care, and eventually, you will see an improved quality of care. Now, average New Brunswickers who require that level of care will not see a difference. That is the good news. They will basically receive the same quality care that they always have. However, what will happen is that the system will be able to treat a lot more patients. We are talking about 90 000 more visits to EMP patients in a year. That is huge. There will be fewer visits to emergency rooms, and that is amazing.

Mr. Northrup: The people of New Brunswick do not have confidence in what the minister just said in the last minute. They do not have confidence that the communications put out there to the parents of disabled children and to seniors of the province... They do not know, and they are worried. They are worried sick about this communications plan. They are worried about what is going to happen on January 1 to all these procedures that happen either at school or in the hospital. Why try to fix something that is not broken? We have an excellent Extra-Mural Program, and we should keep it in place.

I am begging... I am asking the Premier and the minister again. Press pause. Let's get more information on this. Let's get it right and do it right for our seniors, for our disabled people, and for everybody here in New Brunswick. Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Making sure that we have high-quality health care services available in all regions of the province is very important for New Brunswickers. This is therefore very important for their government. I can tell you that this is why we are investing more in our health care system and investing strategically. It is to make sure a high-quality health care system is in place.

[Original]

I have to say that the member opposite is not wrong to say that the communications plan has been a challenge when it comes to this new project. I think that he can very much recognize that the members opposite have played a very big part, a very big role, in ensuring that the communications plan would be difficult. However, what I can tell you is that their fearmongering is not going to stop us from doing what is right. I can tell you that if they want to



criticize somebody for health care, they should criticize the Leader of the Opposition, who says that there are too many hospitals. The member opposite should be worried about Sussex.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Ms. Wilson: Day after day, we hear about fearmongering. People in this province are worried and with good reason because this government does not have a very good track record. Why are we losing a crown jewel, something that the people of this province treasure, our Extra-Mural Program? I asked several questions yesterday and really did not get an answer. I want to know why the government has not decided to hire more nurses instead of hiring 21 management positions.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I have to say that... Well, let's give clear answers to the member opposite. Are we at any risk of losing that crown jewel, which is the Extra-Mural Program? Let me be clear. The answer is, no, we are not at risk of losing the Extra-Mural Program. We are here to enhance that program. That program will be staying, and it will remain the crown jewel of our health care service here in New Brunswick. Not only will people not see differences, but they will see improvements when they do see differences. By our doing so, people will say that this is a better, enhanced service.

Of course, as the Premier has said, the opposition members love to fearmonger, and they do it well. They have kind of developed an expertise in that. However, the good news is that we have developed an expertise to provide quality health care service to New Brunswickers. That is what we are going to do with this partnership with Medavie. We are going to provide for more visits and less time in emergency rooms. It is going to be fantastic.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Ms. Wilson: How? How is the government going to accomplish that? How is Medavie going to accomplish that if there are no nurses to be hired? How is the government going to create 15% fewer visits to the ER?

The track record on jobs alone... That is just one item that I want to point out. Look at Corridor Resources in the Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins riding. The government has completely ignored the problem there.

I want to know from the minister why the government did not trust its own staff to address the problems, to provide more nurses, and to create a better way to have fewer visits to the ER. Why did it not get its own staff to do this work?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is not surprising to see that the opposition members are flabbergasted at how we are able to accomplish the things that we have been doing. They are flabbergasted at the fact that we have been able to reduce the deficit by 67%, all the while investing more in health care, all the while investing more in education, and all the while growing the economy



year after year. We have done that because we are working with the people of our province on their priorities.

What is interesting is that the member for Moncton Southwest mentioned Sussex yet again. I have to point out that if there is anybody that the member from that area should be questioning, it is his Leader of the Opposition, who said, when he was the Minister of Finance, that there are too many hospitals in this province. He said that, in his opinion, we should be consolidating our hospitals. I want to let the member opposite know that it would mean that his hospital in Sussex would be closed down if the Leader of the Opposition were the Premier. Worry not. Our government believes in access to health care and will never close a hospital in this province.

Ms. Wilson: Fearmongering? Who is fearmongering now? Are we on this side of the House flabbergasted? We are flabbergasted by some of the ridiculous responses that we are getting here today.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wilson: I asked yesterday where the managers that are to be hired will come from. What is the qualification level?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé will come to order.

Ms. Wilson: What about the people who are already managing this? How will the Gallant government hire, and what does the hiring process look like?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: If the member for Moncton Southwest does not want to fearmonger, then I suggest that she just get up and say: Oh, okay, we get it. We understand why this project is moving forward. You want to increase by 15% the number of visitations that people will be getting when it comes to extra-mural care. Oh, we understand now. She could get up and recognize that one of the goals is that there will be fewer ER visits by those patients in the Extra-Mural Program. She has never mentioned that. The opposition members have never mentioned any of the benefits of this program. Instead, they have been fearmongering.

It is not fearmongering to quote the Leader of the Opposition, who said, when he was the Minister of Finance, that there are too many hospitals in this province. He said that we should be consolidating the hospitals in this province. Those are the words of the Leader of the Opposition. That is not fearmongering. That is quoting the Leader of the Opposition, so if I were the member who represents the hospital in Sussex, I would be questioning the Leader of the Opposition. But, do not worry. We will close no hospitals as long as we are in government.

