

December 12, 2017

[*Translation*]

### Property Tax

**Mr. Higgs:** I am wondering whether the Premier and his Chief of Staff had time to talk about the property tax scandal while they were travelling. We want to hear testimony, but the Premier said he is against that. Is the Premier ready to rise in the House today and tell New Brunswickers whose story they should believe about the property tax fiasco? Should they believe the Premier's story or the one from his Chief of Staff?

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition, who, once again, is giving me the opportunity to note that thousands and thousands of property assessment errors have been made in our province since 2011. Unfortunately, the former government took no steps to put an end to these errors, because, as the Leader of the Opposition used to say when he was Minister of Finance, he considered the system fair and equitable.

For the last seven months, we have known about the billing problem that caused property assessment errors this year, but the Leader of the Opposition has taken no opportunity—I am indeed saying no opportunity—to make suggestions to improve the situation. He prefers to focus on his attempts to score political points.

On our side of the House, we have received the Auditor General's 25 recommendations, and we will implement them.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Higgs:** Last week in committee, we learned just what those errors were. They were being called errors, but now they are not by the minister, because they were not. They were updates. They were revisions. They were modifications that happen every year as the reviews are done. The truth came out in that committee in relation to exactly what those 9 000 issues were. It is part of the process for Service New Brunswick.

The Premier and his Chief of Staff had their picture, which was taken at the Premiers' meeting, making the rounds on social media. I am curious as to whether they had time to get their stories straight on the property tax scandal. Is the Premier ready to get on his feet today and tell the people of New Brunswick which story they should believe about the scandal—the story the Premier is telling or the story his Chief of Staff is telling? Both cannot be factual. We are only asking to identify which one is true.



[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** I have had many opportunities to say this: The Auditor General's version is obviously the one to believe. She was very clear on this: There is nothing left to verify because she answered all the questions. No mystery remains. When she presented her report to the committee, one or two weeks ago, she even very clearly replied to a question from an opposition member by saying that everything that had to be verified had been verified.

We are therefore happy to have asked that this work be done by the Auditor General, who produced an independent report based on clear and concrete evidence. In her report, the Auditor General made 25 recommendations to us, and it is high time we reviewed and implemented them, because New Brunswickers expect us to implement a fair and equitable system, which they truly deserve.

[Original]

### Health Care Services

**Mr. Higgs:** The Premier has had demonstrations at his constituency office against the privatization of extra-mural services. The results from Ambulance New Brunswick are unacceptable. Ambulances were sidelined 14 000 times. Add to this the secrecy from NB EMS about the very basic details of ambulance services, calling them intellectual property. Is this now enough for the Premier to park this deal, to get the situation right for New Brunswickers, and to leave extra-mural services alone? Let's get the details out there. There are too many unknowns, there is too much secrecy, and the people of this province deserve better. The opportunity is now for the Premier to do the right thing and shelve this deal. Let's get all the facts on the table.

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** Gee, there were so many things said that I do not know where to start. Let's keep it to the essentials. Let's talk about the wonderful partnership that the government of New Brunswick and the Department of Health have established with Medavie. We are very proud of this partnership. This partnership will allow better integration between very important services—Ambulance New Brunswick, the Extra-Mural Program, and Tele-Care 811. That will allow enhanced capacity within the system.

The good news is that for all those three services, service will continue as such. It will be business as usual, and eventually, you will start seeing improvements. You will see 15% more visits to New Brunswick homes by Extra-Mural Program patients. You will see 15% fewer visits to emergency rooms by these patients, and we will also be maintaining that same level of quality of care. It is coming on January 1, 2018, to a community near you.

**Mr. Higgs:** Why are we not convinced? It is because, despite all the rhetoric, the facts do not show the reality. They do not illustrate what money is being spent, where it is being spent, and why it is being spent, because the results are not there.



Let's look at the most recent statistics from the Fraser Institute. We obviously need a better way to move our province forward. We need practical solutions to the most urgent problems.

Let's look at New Brunswick waiting times. Despite record investments, as we hear over and over again, New Brunswickers are waiting too long for medical care—longer than anywhere else in Canada. The Fraser Institute reports that New Brunswick wait times for medically necessary treatment have increased to an average of 41.7 weeks in New Brunswick—the longest in Canada. Ontario's, at 15 weeks, are the shortest.

Hospital wait times trending in the wrong direction is disturbing—money flowing out the door with no results. This government took us from the worst wait times in the nation in 2015 to even worse wait times in 2017—the longest ever recorded.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time. Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The largest challenge facing our province is an aging population. That means that unfortunate pressures will be put on our workforce. That is why, as a government, we are investing more in education than any other government in the history of this province. That is why we are investing in a free tuition program to allow our people here in this province to go to college and university for free when they need the most support. That is why we are also working very hard to ensure that we increase our population. An aging population also puts pressure on the province's ability to offer health care and senior care.

We have to innovate. We have to make strategic investments. We have to work with community leaders and all our allied health members to ensure that we are doing the best we can to curb the costs that will come to our system, all the while providing the best care. I can tell you that is exactly what our government is doing and will continue to do moving forward.

**Mr. Higgs:** The only person or individual in this province that does not have a sense of urgency about the conditions in this province is the Premier. It is nice to be calm and have innovation through taxation and feel as though that is a solution. One of the other true tests of government is when the people of the province can say this: I am better off now, and life is better since this government took office. Is this how New Brunswickers feel?

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** Hospital wait times have grown worse under this government. We also learned last week that the average net worth of New Brunswickers actually dropped. It is the only province in Canada to have had this happen. Innovation through taxation—what a formula to success. No results. There is nothing pointing in a direction that is improving our province, but we are going to stay calm about it. Trust us. We are ready to tax you again.



What about these results? Can the Premier comment about yet another story that says that New Brunswick is headed solidly for last place in all categories? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** There is no doubt that when we became the government of the people of New Brunswick, when we were lucky enough to gain their confidence, this province faced massive challenges. From 2011 to 2014, under the watch of the Leader of the Opposition as the Minister of Finance, the economy retracted.

Since then, we have worked with community leaders, the people of New Brunswick, and the business community to make strategic investments. Because of those strategic investments and the hard work of New Brunswickers, the economy grew in 2015. It grew at the third-fastest rate in Canada, only behind Ontario and British Columbia. In 2016, the economy grew yet again off that growth at about the Canadian average rate. In 2017, it is estimated to grow yet again.

We did not follow the austerity and the idea that you could cut your way to prosperity, as the Leader of the Opposition did. We are investing in growth, and it is providing good jobs and an economy that is strong for New Brunswickers.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Mr. Higgs:** It is interesting to hear the Premier talk about how he worked with New Brunswickers. We have worked with New Brunswickers. We have taxed New Brunswickers to the brink of losing everything that they have because the government cannot get enough revenue. We have taxed in every imaginable way. That is the formula. Innovation through taxation.

## Natural Gas

I would like to ask some questions in relation to, let's say, the future and more costs coming to this province. A reliable energy supply is vital to the future of New Brunswick. The domestic supply of natural gas is running out in the Maritimes. It is predicted to run out over the next one to two years. Now, I know that the Premier is only focused until September 2018, but let's think of New Brunswick beyond that. All the predictions are that the supply of natural gas is going to run out in the next two years. What is the Premier's plan? This could have a 30% increase in energy costs in this province. What is the Premier's plan?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We did raise taxes on the 1% richest in this province so that we could invest more in education and health care.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I know that the Leader of the Opposition did not support that. He wants to give tax breaks to the wealthy. He wants to give tax breaks to large corporations. That is not what we are doing.

We are ensuring that we can invest in the priorities of New Brunswickers by asking the rich to pay more. I can tell you that it is working. The economy is growing, and wages for the people of our province are also growing. In 2016, we saw the largest wage increase, relatively speaking, in the country happen right here in New Brunswick, meaning that more New Brunswickers are making more money and they have more money in their pockets to invest in their communities and to ensure that their families have a good quality of life. Yes, the economy under his watch retracted. Under ours, it is growing and it is working for everyone.

**Mr. Higgs:** Once again, there are no answers, yet we talk about wages. What impact did the military base increase in wages have on that number? Significant and huge, but those details really do not matter. This government is recognized as spending beyond control in every category, but it has no results to back it up—no results once again.

The question was that we have a domestic gas supply running out. That means that gas is going to come from the Midwest. That means a huge pipeline cost coming in two years. The experts say that in two years' time, we will be running out of the domestic source. That means that every little business... I know that the Premier does not really care about businesses of any size in this province. The taxation levels have proven that. What is the plan? What is the plan when our source has run out, the line starts coming out our way, and the costs of energy start going up by 30% or 40% to every business in the province? What is the plan? Is there a plan beyond September 2018? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** One thing that is very clear is that we know what the plan of the Leader of the Opposition is. He wants to cut taxes for the wealthy.

(Interjection.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member from Miramichi Bay will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** He wants to cut taxes for large corporations. I think we all know this in this province: He wants to ensure that we are hydraulically fracturing across the province. We recognize that. We know that.

He wants to know what our plan is. Our plan is reducing the deficit by 67% since we have been the government while investing more in education, while investing more in health care, and—I know that this is foreign to the Leader of the Opposition—while growing the economy every single year. He is just flabbergasted. He does not understand how we can be taxing the wealthiest more, how we can be asking large corporations to pay more, and how we can be investing more in education and health care, all the while growing the economy.



(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** He cut everything that I just mentioned that is important to New Brunswickers. He wants to cut taxes for the wealthy and for corporations, and the economy would retract under that austerity and under his plans.

(Interjection.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Portland-Simonds will come to order.

## Jobs

**Mr. Higgs:** A tax-funded economy—a tax-funded economy by anyone who is still working and able to pay tax in this province.

I have asked several questions this morning and gotten no answers. Let's ask one that the Premier should be very familiar with. It was a promise made during the election—10 000 jobs. If the economy is growing at such a great pace as he would like to make people think it is—and we know the only growth is a tax-funded economy—where have the jobs gone, the 10 000 jobs that were promised? I think that the last I read, it was 6 000 fewer than when we started. What about the jobs that people are going elsewhere to find and that do not exist in this province because all this province and this government know is to tax more so that they can spend more and bribe and buy your vote in the next election?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I recognize that the Leader of the Opposition thinks he is the smartest guy in this room. I recognize that the Leader of the Opposition thinks he is smarter than the Auditor General. I recognize that the Leader of the Opposition thinks he is smarter than Statistics Canada. I would like him to explain to Statistics Canada why the numbers that suggest that the economy retracted under his watch as Minister of Finance, as he cut into education and health care and tried to help the wealthy and the large corporations... I would also like him to explain how Statistics Canada, in his opinion, is wrong when it says that and how Statistics Canada is, in his opinion, wrong when it says that the economy of New Brunswick grew in 2015 and grew yet again in 2016. While he is at it, he can say how all the projections by major banks and others say that the economy is estimated to grow yet again in 2017. The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to his own opinions. He is not entitled to his own facts.

**Mr. Higgs:** There were 10 000 jobs pledged, and I think we are 6 000 down from where we started. I think those numbers are StatsCan numbers. The Premier likes to talk about StatsCan. He was just referring to that. I am surprised to hear him talk about facts because the only facts that usually come out are half-facts. That is what we have seen in all cases. It is half a fact because the rest of the story often never appears.





Going to the 10 000-job pledge and all the money being spent because we are investing record amounts of your tax dollars... The 10 000-job pledge...

(Interjection.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** Would the Premier like to talk about what happened to the 10 000 jobs that this government was going to create? It was going to move our province forward with 10 000 new jobs, not 6 000 people leaving the province or 10 000 people leaving the actual workforce because the jobs are not there. Let's have just that one simple question answered. Without a lot of fanfare, let's have just the facts. Thank you. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The facts are indeed very, very simple: There was an economic downturn when the current Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance. There was a downturn because he was cutting investments in education and health. He just wanted to help the wealthiest and the large corporations in the province.

Since our government was elected, we have been making strategic investments to grow our economy. We are investing in our infrastructure, and we have helped small businesses by lowering their tax rate four times. We have made strategic investments to foster innovation in our industries and businesses. In addition, we are investing record amounts in education. We are making investments to improve access to postsecondary education for our students, and we are also making investments to improve our health care system.

[*Original*]

## Government Agenda

**Mr. Higgs:** You know, the speaking notes are going to be wearing thin over the next several months, wearing thin because they are hollow.

A Fraser Institute fact is this: longest waiting time in the country. That is a fact, and it is not a self-made fact from a government that is self-promoting. That is a fact from the outside. CFIB says that 78% of businesses in this province think that we are going the wrong way and that they are being taxed more than they ever were before. It also reported that every man, woman, and child has \$1 000 more tax than they did three years ago. Those are the facts.

When we start looking at facts, we find that everybody but mirror, mirror on the wall is seeing our province in trouble but there is no sense of urgency on the government side. It is because—do you know what?—we will get more money from Ottawa to buy the next election and all will



be well. We will get marijuana in place, we will buy the next election, and all will be well. There just are not facts that support his argument. Where are the facts?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** In fact, by working with community leaders and the business community, we were able to create thousands and thousands of jobs. Also, if we had not made the investments, these thousands and thousands of jobs would not have been created.

I understand the argument from the Opposition Leader very well because there was no such net gain in the number of jobs. However, fortunately, we made investments to create thousands and thousands of jobs, since, if we had used the approach that the current Opposition Leader used when his government was in power, we would have had a net loss in jobs and a downturn in our economy. We will certainly not use the approach of the Opposition Leader: We will not make cuts in education and health, and we will invest more to grow our economy so that it helps everybody.

## Health Care

**Mr. Coon:** Yesterday, over 100 people, mainly seniors, went to the Premier's constituency office in Dieppe to give him a clear message: The Extra-Mural Program is not for sale. Seniors' groups, such as the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights and the Association francophone des aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick, did everything they could to ensure the Extra-Mural Program remains part of the health networks. The Minister of Health says this decision should benefit seniors, but they are all against it. Will the Premier give up on moving Extra-Mural Program staff out of the Horizon and Vitalité health networks?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I appreciate the question. There is no doubt that our government and all members, I hope, understand very clearly that people have the right to demonstrate and that we support such action in our province. There is no doubt: We are listening to New Brunswickers, including these people.

Still, I understand why certain people have concerns, because, according to the opposition, all kinds of horrible things are happening in the province. However, at the same time, nice things are happening, and that includes this deal. That said, the opposition has not even recognized the goal of this deal yet.

The goal of this deal is to increase the number of visits we can provide to seniors and people who want home care, decrease the number of times people will need to go to emergency rooms, and maintain the quality of currently provided services.





[Original]

**Mr. Coon:** The Premier is just not listening. Seniors are demanding that he keep extra-mural health services embedded in the regional health authorities—publicly managed and publicly administered—to best serve the interests of the public. He keeps saying that this scheme to put 700 extra-mural staff into Ambulance New Brunswick is to better serve seniors. Seniors do not want it. The Association francophone des aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick and the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights are categorically opposed. Will the minister and the Premier do the right thing and withdraw Bill 5, *An Act Respecting Extra-Mural Services*, and put an end to this reckless scheme?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have a lot of respect for the member opposite, the member from the third party, but the words that he is using are nothing but fearmongering. I would ask the opposition and now, unfortunately, the member from the third party to acknowledge at least what we have said are the goals of this deal. This is to improve services. It is to increase the number of visits that our seniors and people who want home care will be able to get. It is to decrease the number of times that seniors have to go to the emergency room because they cannot get the services that they need at home. It is in fact to keep the same quality and satisfaction, if not improve it.

We have not heard the opposition members or, unfortunately, the gentleman from the third party acknowledge these goals. They are not even acknowledging that, yes, indeed, the employees are still going to be funded by the government. It is still going to be a publicly funded program, and the management is going to be done by a nonprofit organization while ensuring that KPIs are in place.

**Mr. Coon:** It was revealed in the media this morning that Medavie Health Services is attempting to hide the results of key performance indicators for Ambulance New Brunswick.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Coon:** They are indicators such as ambulance response and 911 dispatch times, quality assurance reports, compliance records, and financial statements. It is arguing that these performance indicators are intellectual property and not public information.

Now, this government intends to hand over the management of actual health services for New Brunswickers that are currently provided by our regional health authorities to Medavie. The Premier has the temerity to suggest that this will change nothing and that it will in fact make things better. Will the Premier end negotiations with Medavie for the contract for extra-mural services now?



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Again, I did not hear the member opposite acknowledge why we are doing this. He does not have to agree, but if we are going to have a debate and discussion about important subjects such as how we are going to deliver good care to the homes of the people of New Brunswick and how we are going to ensure that our seniors are able to stay in their homes as long as possible and are able to retire with the dignity and respect that they deserve, I think that it at least merits the Leader of the Opposition, the opposition, and the member from the third party acknowledging what this deal is about. They do not have to agree with it, but they could at least demonstrate to New Brunswickers that they understand what we are trying to accomplish. If they have other ideas of how to accomplish that, we would be more than willing to hear them, discuss them, and debate them.

(Interjection.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Fredericton West-Hanwell will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Unfortunately, the opposition members and now the member from the third party, who I thought was above that, are simply trying to gain political points. No worries. This government will focus on the priorities of New Brunswickers, delivering good care to seniors across this province.

## Property Tax

**Mr. Fitch:** The Auditor General's report into the property tax scandal concluded with conflicting accounts. Whom are New Brunswickers supposed to believe? That is the \$14.42 question. Are New Brunswickers supposed to believe the Premier, who told the Auditor General that he learned of the fast track in March 2017, or should they believe the Premier's Chief of Staff, who said the Premier learned of the fast track in May 2016 and was the one who brought it into the Premier's Office in the first place? Would the Premier rise and stop hiding behind the Attorney General? Will the Premier finally admit that he knew about the fast track in 2016, or will he deny the story being told by the Chief of Staff?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** I thank the opposition member.

[Original]

I do not know how many times I have to say it, but the Auditor General was quite clear. There are no outstanding issues. There are no mysteries at all. She went even further. She was very clear when the member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac asked her the following question: "Are you certain that the Premier's Chief of Staff did not order the fast tracking"? She said: "Based on the evidence ... that is not what happened".



I will take the 20 seconds that are left to remind everyone that since 2011, there have been thousands and thousands of errors. The Leader of the Opposition, when he was Minister of Finance, said that it was a fair and equitable system. Well, we do not believe so. We have a very important report and 25 recommendations that we are going to follow. Thank you.

**Mr. Fitch:** Again, I will rise and remind the Attorney General that he will say it until all the conflicts—all the conflicts—are resolved in the report from the Auditor General. Some of the evidence was not obtainable, such as voice and phone call recordings.

On May 6, 2016, the Premier learned of the idea of the fast-tracked property tax modernization effort. The Premier learned of this at a demonstration by nb<sup>+</sup> digital lab. The Premier went back to his office and told his Chief of Staff about the fast-track opportunity. That is the story from the Chief of Staff—that the Premier knew in May 2016. Or, the Premier knew nothing about the fast track until March 2017. That is the story that the Premier is telling. These are two very different stories. Will the Premier rise today and tell us which story is correct?

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** As I have said many times in this House before, it is impossible for the Premier to have come back on May 6, 2016, and to have talked about the fast track. As the Auditor General confirmed in interviews with the SNB staff present, the fast track did not come up in the presentation to the Premier.

[*Translation*]

I want to repeat that it is high time to take action, and our government received 25 important recommendations from the Auditor General. She told us that there are indeed problems to solve. With regard to these problems, the worst year was 2012.

The Auditor General reminded us that errors have been made since 2011. She examined the whole issue and told us that there is nothing left to look at and that everything is clear. She figured out what needs to be done to resolve the situation and made 25 recommendations, which we will follow.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Mr. Fitch:** Since it is the mandate or the MO of this Premier to take the last question, I will again give him the opportunity to answer this last question and to tell us this: Which story do we believe? Do we believe the story he told, or do we believe the story of the Chief of Staff? The Premier said in his mandate letter: “take responsibility for everything you do”. The Premier went on to say how proud he was of his actions when he followed his own advice. I wonder if the Premier would have some pride today and tell us which story is correct—his story or his Chief of Staff’s. They are different. There is a gap. Let’s make sure we know which one the people of this province have to believe.



[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** It is unfortunate to see opposition members focus their efforts on scoring political points again today. New Brunswickers want all members to further their priorities of growing the economy and improving education and health care in our province.

[*Original*]

We believe one of the best ways to strengthen the economy, education, and health care in this province is by investing in early childhood development. I have to say it is disappointing not to hear the opposition mention one thing about what we have announced today and over the last few days. We, along with the Trudeau government, will be investing \$71 million to improve child care in this province and make it more accessible by creating more spaces, by improving its quality, by working with operators and workers in the industry, and by increasing affordability for those who are struggling to pay for child care.

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

