

February 6, 2018

[Original]

Economy

Mr. Higgs: Herb Emery, chair of regional economics at the University of New Brunswick, said: “When you’re perpetually on the deficit side, it does start to become worrisome because somebody has to pay for that and if it’s not going to come from growth of the economy, it means ... taxes go up”. We have seen taxes increased continually by this government because that is the only method by which it could finance its excess spending.

Today, I would like to ask this of the Premier: Is the government just hoping that the economy will grow? It was seventh in 2016, it was eighth in 2017, and now it is running for dead last, connected with Newfoundland and Labrador. Is that the growth plan for this province? I am asking that of the Premier today.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Unlike the Leader of the Opposition when he was the Minister of Finance cutting into health care and education, we are not just sitting on our hands hoping that the economy grows. We are working with New Brunswickers to invest strategically in our multi-year Economic Growth Plan that is growing the economy.

From 2011 to 2014, under the Leader of the Opposition’s watch, the economy shrank. It shrank because the Leader of the Opposition focused on an austerity agenda. We are focused on an agenda that works for all New Brunswickers. In 2015, the economy of our province grew at the third-fastest rate of all the provinces in Canada. It grew again in 2016 at about the Canadian average rate. In 2017, the analysts say that it grew again, and projections tell us that it will grow yet again in 2018. There is no secret. Austerity does not work. Investing in the priorities of New Brunswickers does.

Mr. Higgs: Sometimes you wonder if the Premier ever reads the paper, ever reads the ratings reports, or ever understands ... Even in his own document from the government, we are dead last, connected with Newfoundland and Labrador—dead last—dropping in 2016, dropping further in 2017, and now dropping again in 2018. That is not a growth plan. That is a recipe for disaster. The Premier cannot seem to listen, saying: I will tax you more, and I will spend more without any results. What will happen? We will just go deeper and deeper. Have we turned a corner? Yes, we have turned the corner. The deficit is now going back up.

I would like to understand this: What is it about all these experts that the Premier just cannot seem to relate to? He cannot seem to understand. Mr. Emery continues to say:

“We may not have the same access to market that we had, we may not see the Bank of Canada keep interest rates low, we may not see young New Brunswickers choosing to stay around,



which means population aging starts to accelerate and the liabilities that aren't even priced into this deficit yet get larger and larger."

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I would wonder whether the Leader of the Opposition has listened to what our government has been saying. We said exactly what he just mentioned. We know that the access to markets may be changing in the future. Because of that, we have an aggressive plan to invest in our multiyear Economic Growth Plan that is going to help our businesses compete so that they can still get into the U.S. market. We will help them compete and open up new markets so that they can diversify around the world.

I agree with his saying that we have to wonder about young New Brunswickers in the province. That is exactly why we have increased investments in youth employment here in this budget by over \$20 million. The reason for that is so that we can ensure that our young people are going to stay here or come back here and also so that we can curb the aging population before us. The answer is investing in the priorities of New Brunswickers. The answer is not austerity, which is what the Leader of the Opposition would have us do.

Mr. Higgs: I am going to talk about business in a minute, but I am going to carry on with Mr. Emery's quotes at this point.

"As long as we're mired in political rhetoric that it's an either-or, we're not going to solve it," he said, comparing it to the Greece debt crisis.

"Debt service costs will eventually lead us to the decisions we have to make and it won't be us making them, it will be the bond rating agencies and the lenders."

I would ask this today of the Premier: Will he listen to the authorities that are saying all around us that New Brunswick is on a track and that track is leading downward? Every authority is looking at New Brunswick as what not to do in Canada. That is when you look at statistics. We are dead last—dead last. Yet, the emperor will continue to say: Oh. All is well. I am going to spend more of your taxpayer dollars, and it will get better.

The experts cannot all be wrong, and we need to start paying attention. Will the Premier start paying attention?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We can keep having this debate if he likes, but we just do not agree with him. We do not agree with him. We saw how the austerity ways of the Leader of the Opposition worked for the province. They retracted our economy. They hurt important services like education and health care.



We are making no qualms about it. We are saying that we are investing more. I know that he does not want to and that he does not agree, but it does not matter what he thinks. What matters is what we can do to help better the lives of the people of New Brunswick.

I know that he wants the austerity ways to come back to New Brunswick. I know that he does not support our investing more. I would ask him, though, if he wants to put away the political rhetoric as he mentioned and tell us where the \$300 million in mystery dollars that he put in the budget, that he was going to find as the Minister of Finance, would come from. I thought that it was \$100 million to \$150 million. It was actually \$300 million in cuts that he needs to explain to New Brunswickers.

Mr. Higgs: I realize that spending and getting results are foreign topics to the Premier. There is no question about that. He talked about small business a few minutes ago. I want to know whether the Premier has looked at the ratings from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and how it has rated the government in terms of red tape reduction. We have heard the Premier talk about this over the mandate. In fact, he even passed hollow legislation not long ago that said red tape reduction was going to be a focus.

I would like to ask the Premier right now: Does he know the ratings on red tape reduction that his government has received from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business since he came to office? The CFIB is an independent group that represents thousands of businesses across this country and in this province. Is the Premier aware of how it is rating this government? If so, could he give me the stats? Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are working very hard with all our partners and all stakeholders to advance New Brunswickers' priorities of education, health, and, of course, economic growth. We are working with our small businesses, and that is why our budget, tabled last week, will once again reduce their tax rate here in New Brunswick. It is the fourth time small businesses will be seeing this kind of reduction. We have reduced the small business tax rate by 44% since we took office.

Moreover, when our budget was tabled last week, we revealed that we will be investing more to help our small businesses in New Brunswick to compete internationally. We want to help them find other markets around the world and thereby diversify their markets. Small businesses are important to our government, and we are working with them to get results.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: I will tell the Premier what the ratings were. When the Premier came to office, when this Liberal government came to office, the ratings were B. They went down the next year. There was no rating because the office did not produce anything, and that was because they fired the whole team that was actually working on red tape reduction. Do you know what it was



after that? It was C-. Then, the year after that, it was C+. The reason it was C+ was that the government passed legislation that it was going to focus on red tape reduction, so giving the government the benefit of the doubt, CFIB said: They are going to focus on it.

Do you know what it is now? It is back to C- because there was another hollow legislation that did not mean anything. There were just the words and no action. It is the same as spending money. There are just the words and just the dollars coming out of everybody's tax pockets but no action—no results.

I ask the Premier this: Can he deny the ratings that are independently assessed on this government in the poor performance category of helping small business and ensuring that red tape is actually reduced? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are working very hard with our partners in the Maritime Provinces to reduce and harmonize our regulations in order to help our small businesses and businesspeople in the province.

Again, I note that, when our last budget was tabled, we unveiled several initiatives that will help the economy and small businesses in New Brunswick.

[*Original*]

I do not understand why the Leader of the Opposition is changing the subject. However, why will he not tell New Brunswickers about his secret plan to cut \$300 million?

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I do not find it funny at all.

The Leader of the Opposition introduced a budget where he did not want to talk about where he would get the money, but he put it black on white that he would find \$300 million. We believe the people of New Brunswick deserve to know, from a guy who wants to be the Premier of the province, where he would cut to find the \$300 million in the budget that he last introduced as the Minister of Finance.

Education System

Mr. Holder: Last week, I asked the Minister of Education when he knew that standardized testing for Grade 4 and Grade 10 had been canceled. It was a simple question. All we needed was a date. But the Premier got up instead, and we did not get an answer. So let's try again. The minister needs to tell the House and the people of New Brunswick today when he learned that the testing was canceled. Give us a date.



Hon. Mr. Kenny: I thank the member opposite for the question. As you heard last week, the Premier answered very well. He even quoted the deputy minister on what took place. What I want to focus on today is that we have actually doubled our test results. We are moving in the right direction.

Every day, we hear the doom and gloom—it is terrible, the doom and gloom. They are always trying to find something negative, but I want to tell you today that positive things are happening in education. Positive things are happening in mental health. We are increasing the budget, whereas the gang on the other side wanted to decrease the budget. It is really frustrating to try to get a positive message out when they are always, constantly, talking doom and gloom.

What I have to say here today is that we are moving forward with education. We are working with all our educators throughout the province. We are working with parents. We are working with groups. We are working with businesspeople. We are moving in the right direction, and we are very proud of the record we are making in education.

Mr. Holder: Here is what we do know. Tests were canceled last spring, because we know they did not happen. Let's assume for a minute that the minister was on top of his file and was aware of this. What New Brunswickers do not understand is why they were never informed until January 19 that the results were not available. Then, on January 19, it was reported that the Education Department could not immediately say where the Grade 4 and Grade 10 results were, never mentioning for a minute that the testing was actually canceled. Only four days later, the government admitted that the tests had been canceled, and as we heard the other day, once again, it blamed a staffing shortage. Why was there a four-day delay? Why could the minister not have told us right then and there, on January 19, that the tests had been canceled last spring?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: As I will say again, look at the staff in the Department of Education who put their hearts and souls into working to make sure that we are moving forward. You will see that, unlike the other government, we are working with these people. What we see here today is opposition members trying to find political scores—no pun intended—to make sure that ... They are saying that it is doom and gloom in education. What I have to say again is that we are making record investments in education year after year and putting the money in the right places to advance. The proof is in the pudding. We have actually advanced our scores for the first time in six years. We are very happy about our record in education.

It is really, really frustrating to hear the doom and gloom every day on every single topic when we are actually making investments in the right places to move New Brunswick forward. We are going to do that through a collaborative method, working as a team on this side and working with all New Brunswickers to make sure that we have the best investments in the right places.



Mr. Holder: There is something rotten in the state of Denmark here today. We are not getting better results because we have not even tested the students in these grades that I am talking about. Those tests were canceled last spring, and when everyone went looking for results this fall, we were told that they were coming. Nobody ever bothered to tell us that the tests themselves were canceled.

As it stands now, we are told that over 10 000 students are scheduled to write these tests sometime this spring. Will the Minister of Education advise the House today as to the exact date when this is going to happen? If we do not get an exact date today, then the people of New Brunswick are left with one conclusion: This government is still asleep at the switch.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The opposition talks about political rhetoric. The minister is absolutely right. We have test scores that come out, our children are working hard and getting results, and our educators are working hard and getting results. The system deserves to be congratulated, yet the members opposite get up and say: How can we take this and try to start some kind of conspiracy theory?

I think that it is important to note yet again the deputy minister's words about the so-called political interference with the school system accusations. These are his words: This is "categorically incorrect".

"The delay was caused by staffing issues affecting the relatively small group of individuals who work in this area," ...

"Designing assessments for specific age groups is complex and specialized work which cannot be done by individuals who do not have the appropriate expertise and experience. Therefore when staffing issues arise, they can be difficult to resolve."

We should not be trying to have, as the opposition members are doing, these conspiracy theories thrown out every time they want to gain political points. We should be celebrating the improved test scores of our children and thanking the educators for the results.

Veterans

Mr. B. Macdonald: Well, Premier Gallant's best friend, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, said this week that Canadian veterans are "asking for more than we are able to give". This is shocking and unacceptable language. I assure you that we on this side of the House do not believe that. In fact, we condemn the Prime Minister's remarks. That is why, four years ago, we worked very hard to adopt a progressive, inclusive definition of veterans, which includes peacekeepers and modern veterans, and we enshrined that in legislation in the *Civil Service Act*.

My question is for the Premier and the Minister responsible for Military Affairs. Will they join me in condemning the Prime Minister's shocking remarks about our veterans, and will they update this House on the progress that they have made to ensure that peacekeepers and



modern veterans, as defined in the *Civil Service Act*, are given priority in veterans' hospitals in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: As the Minister responsible for Military Affairs, I am very proud to work very closely with the military all around New Brunswick, whether they are reservists or full-time members.

I can tell you that we continuously work with CFB Gagetown, the home of the army. We will continue to work with CFB Gagetown to improve the quality of life—not so much for the members themselves, because that is under federal jurisdiction, as the member opposite talked about—and we want to focus on the families. When spouses go away to help serve and protect our province and our country, we want to help the families, to make sure that there are jobs available. We want to make sure that they have great attributes in the education system and the job force. We will continue to work with our military families in CFB Gagetown and all around New Brunswick.

Again, I am very proud to be the Minister responsible for Military Affairs.

Mr. B. Macdonald: There is a military unit in Canada that I have great respect for, and its motto is Deeds Not Words. What we get from the minister opposite is a bunch of words yet no deeds.

Does the minister believe that New Brunswick veterans are asking for more than we are able to give? Will they, from this day forward, commit to ensuring that New Brunswick veterans, as defined in the *Civil Service Act*, are given priority in New Brunswick's veterans hospitals? Will they make that basic commitment now? As far as I can tell, the minister has done nothing about that issue that I raised with him over three years ago.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I find it very ironic that the member opposite ... I want to thank him for his time in service, but again, they did nothing in the four years that they had either.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. The member for New Maryland-Sunbury will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I have met with the member opposite on a number of issues.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac will come to order. The member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I have had the opportunity to meet with the member opposite on a number of issues and will continue to work with anybody who has problems to deal with the people of the military.



Again, the member opposite knows that under the military, defense is a federal issue, but as a government in New Brunswick, we will continue to help the families of those people who serve our country and who make us have the respect that we have and the freedoms that we have in our province. I was proud that the Premier brought his caucus down to CFB Gagetown. We met with the military staff down there, and they were very proud. They said that they have dealt with no other government with such communication and open lines of communication.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for New Maryland-Sunbury will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: So I am very proud. Thank you.

Mr. B. Macdonald: The argument that you did not do anything so we are not going to do anything is pretty weak. I would like to list a few of the things that we did when we were in government. We established the Highway of Heroes in New Brunswick. We established Emergency Services Day. We brought Helmets to Hardhats to New Brunswick to help veterans transition. We cut property taxes on legions. We got free entry into parks for first responders. We established a 1 800 line for all veterans in New Brunswick, which is a program, I might add, that this minister cut.

We have heard his leader in Ottawa tell us that veterans are asking for more than we are able to give. Yet, in this province, veterans who do not fall under the traditional definition of “veteran” by the federal government are not allowed entry into veterans hospitals. I am asking this minister to commit to something right now, today, to ensure that New Brunswick veterans as defined in the *Civil Service Act* have priority in our veterans hospitals. Let’s see some action.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I applaud the member opposite for what they have done to help our military families and the people serving. Good for them.

We, too, have done a great many things through working with Helmets to Hardhats. We also accomplished a number of things with drivers’ licenses to allow people who are retiring from the military to get their drivers’ licenses. They can go right to Service New Brunswick, and it is an easy process. We are very proud of that. Again, we have met many times with the colonel down at CFB Gagetown and the members across the province. We have worked with our legions to help them with projects with DTI or with RDC money, and we continue. Just down the street is our provincial cenotaph. There is the brand-new provincial cenotaph that I am very proud our government has committed to. We will continue to work with our military, and I am very proud, again, to have the great relationship that we have with CFB Gagetown and all the reserves around the province.



[Translation]

Government Contracts

Mr. Coon: The government is contracting out the management of two drug programs to Blue Cross Medavie. For the next year, New Brunswick will have to pay out over \$200 million for the New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program and the Drug Insurance Plan. Last year, at a meeting of the Committee on Public Accounts, the Deputy Minister of Health told me that Blue Cross Medavie had received \$6.8 million for the management of these two drug programs. Will it receive the same amount again this year to manage these two public programs?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I appreciate the question. What I can say is that Blue Cross Medavie does indeed handle the New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program and does a fine job. By the way, this work is completely separate from Medavie Health Services. I want to clarify that, and I think it is always good to bear it in mind.

As for the New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program, I think the amounts are similar, and I will get back to you with more details on that, because I am not able to give you the precise answer right now.

[Original]

I will take the question under advisement.

Mr. Coon: Unlike the contract with Medavie for managing Ambulance New Brunswick and our extra-mural health services, the \$6-million-something contracts with Medavie to manage our public drug plans have never been made public—never. We do not know whether Medavie has to meet key performance targets or indicators. We do not know whether these contracts provide bonuses to Medavie. We do not even know when these contracts expire. Will the Minister of Health release the contracts with Medavie for the Prescription Drug Program and the New Brunswick Drug Plan?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I can say—and this was actually confirmed to me by the opposition Health Critic—that this is a totally separate issue from the Medavie partnership regarding extra-mural, Ambulance New Brunswick, and Tele-Care. This is purely an administrative procedure done by Medavie with regard to the New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program. As I said, it is a totally separate issue. Again, I will look into this question in more depth. I need to take this under advisement.

Mr. Coon: I am simply looking for an undertaking from the minister to agree to release the contracts that were signed with Medavie to administer our prescription drug programs. It is very simple. These contracts were signed specifically to administer the two prescription drug programs—the two drug programs—for the government of New Brunswick. We have never seen the contracts. They have never been released. We do not know what they contain.



We do not know whether Medavie has to meet any key performance indicators, whether there are bonuses written into them—even, as I said, how long those contracts are or when they expire—or whether the department is planning to review the performance of Medavie in its administration of those drug plans. This question is for the minister: Will he undertake to release those contracts for the administration of the provincial drug plans?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: As I said, we are very proud of the work we are doing with Medavie, and that includes our partnership with regard to the Extra-Mural Program, along with the integration of services with Ambulance New Brunswick and Tele-Care 811. We are also proud of the fact that Medavie is administering the New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program. It does fantastic work, and we are proud to be working with a New Brunswick company that is seen across the country as one of the best companies dealing with this type of sector. Again, as I said, I will take the question under advisement. I will look into this further, and I will come back with a response. Thank you very much.

Veterans

Mr. Jeff Carr: I would like to go back and follow up with the Deputy Premier, on the heels of my colleague from Fredericton West-Hanwell. We were discussing, here in the Legislature, the lives of our veterans, and the Deputy Premier had the opportunity to use this time to talk respectfully about our veterans rather than using the rhetoric from his former seatmate to talk about what others did in the past or did not do in the past. He should be ashamed of himself. He is a base rat, just as I am. Our families are veterans. They gave up their lives to protect our country. I want to know this today, as my colleague asked: Does he stand with our veterans, or does he stand with Justin Trudeau?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I do not understand where the member for New Maryland-Sunbury is coming from. I, too, am a very proud member of a military family and grew up at CFB Gagetown. I take much pride in the fact that my father served for 33 years. We were stationed in Oromocto for his whole career. I continue to thank the members of our military, both foreign and domestic, and we continue to thank them for the service they provide.

We want to focus on their families so that their families will have better health care, better education, and better employment here while their family members are away serving and helping the freedoms of this country. For the member opposite to say that I do not take pride in the military ... We on this side certainly do, as we have mentioned many, many times. We have even taken our caucus to see the colonel at CFB Gagetown so that he could show those who might not understand the military life, but I sure do. Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Carr: It is a simple yes or no answer. Does he stand with the veterans and their health care, or does he stand with Justin Trudeau?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I want to tell the member opposite that we will continue to help any member of the military and our veterans. We will continue to do so.



Again, we have spoken with our Member of Parliament here in the Fredericton area. We will continue to fight for our military families and our veterans. I am very proud to be a person who has lived and seen the life of a military family. I have seen what the men and women do to sacrifice each and every day to keep the freedoms of the wonderful country that we live in, both foreign and domestic. I can tell you that for anything, our door is always open. We continue to meet with our veterans. We continue to meet with our legion members.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac will come to order and consider himself warned.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: We continue to invest in the Military Family Resource Centre down in Oromocto. We continue to invest there. As the member for Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton knows, we continue to invest and help those families. That is what we are going to focus on, the families of the military.

Mr. Jeff Carr: I do not need a long, drawn-out explanation of his speaking points. We know what we are to do in here. We know whom we are to support. However, when the Deputy Premier takes his opportunity to answer and lays blame on who did not do what in the past, it is a disrespect toward our men and women who have worn their uniforms in the past, who wear them in the present, and the ones who will wear them in the future. I do not need the speaking points.

Here is a quote from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: “they are asking for more than we are able to give”. Does the Deputy Premier believe that Justin Trudeau is right, or is he going to stand up for the veterans of this country?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think that it is a bit unfortunate to see the opposition members take the angle that they have taken just now. There is not one person in this Legislature who does not deeply—deeply—encourage our military people here in New Brunswick and across the country, those who are serving abroad and those who serve domestically. There is not one person in this Legislature who does not understand the sacrifice that they make and who does not appreciate what they do for our country every single day. For the member opposite to try to insinuate anything but that is unfortunate. He knows that the Deputy Premier takes very much to heart the military families that are here and the people who serve in the military, just as we know that every member opposite does as well. I would certainly encourage the opposition to try to keep a higher level of decorum in the debate, respecting all the legislators in this room.

I can tell you one thing that we are very happy about, and that is the Trudeau government investing millions and millions and millions of dollars at Base Gagetown. We continue to work with the federal government to make sure that we have a strong military.





**Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick
Oral Questions**

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

