

February 7, 2018

[Original]

## Veterans

**Mr. Higgs:** Following my colleague's note, I would like to pose a question to the members opposite, the Liberal government here and its members. I want to know whether there is any member on the government side who would rise today to condemn the words of the Prime Minister when he told the wounded soldiers that veterans are asking too much—"asking for more than we are able to give". I believe that was the Prime Minister's comment. I think that it is time to stand up for veterans, and I would like to know who on that side does not agree with that. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Horsman:** Again, I, as the Minister responsible for Military Affairs in our province, want to, first and foremost, thank the serving members of our military. This is totally a federal issue. It is before the courts now, so I will not comment on it.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Horsman:** But I just want to remark that at the time when Prime Minister Harper was in, some questions...

### ***Conservatives slash 900 jobs despite pleas from managers***

*The Harper government launched the largest cuts to staff at Veterans Affairs in history. When they were finished, nearly 900 jobs or about one quarter of the staff had been cut, with some of the biggest cuts coming in the disability awards branch.*

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Horsman:** If they wish to talk, I am very proud. As the member opposite yesterday... We have met with ANAVETS, and we have met with members of the legions. I have met with the military, whether it be the cadets or young people starting to think about a career in the military. And I am proud to be there for them when they need it.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** We are all now too familiar with the words of the Prime Minister, that veterans are asking for more than we are able to give. However, luckily, here in New Brunswick,



we have a minister designated for veterans' affairs, for military affairs, and it is his responsibility to stand up for the veterans of New Brunswick.

We have given the Gallant government any number of opportunities to denounce the words of the Prime Minister and to stand with New Brunswick veterans, yet this government remained silent when its federal cousins found \$10.5 million to give to Omar Khadr. When Omar Khadr asked for money, this government did not say: Well, you are asking for more than we can give. They gave him the money.

Will this government now stand with New Brunswick veterans, condemn the words of the Prime Minister, and ensure that our veterans come first in New Brunswick veterans' hospitals?

**Hon. Mr. Horsman:** I wonder whether the opposition will be standing after I make my comments for this one. We are very proud of the serving members of our military. I am very proud to serve and to meet with any of our veterans in our province. I have met on behalf of the member opposite. If he wanted to meet, we sat down and met with people from ANAVETS, our people who are military veterans, at the Legion. We can see the improvements. Again, Colonel Osmond down at CFB Gagetown has stated that this government on this side of the floor has been the best government that it has ever seen with regard to communication and openness.

The DVA approached Horizon Health... And I can prove that we are doing well. We have approached the DVA. We have talked to our MP, and we have seen admissions for a new generation of veterans in our units. We will continue to help and fight for the veterans.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** Unfortunately, there is a score out there now: Omar Khadr, \$10.5 million, and veterans, zero.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** Here in the province in our veterans' hospitals—veterans' hospitals that are owned by the province—beds that are not filled by federal veterans are distributed on an as-needed basis by the health-care system. The minister claims that he has met with veterans' groups. In fact, I have been there for some of those discussions. The number one priority was to ensure that in New Brunswick, those beds that are available are allocated to veterans in New Brunswick as defined by the *Civil Service Act*.

Yesterday, I asked this minister whether he would assure us that vacancies in veterans' hospitals would be filled in a way that New Brunswick veterans, peacekeeping veterans, veterans of Egypt and Sinai and Cyprus get priority in our hospitals. He still has not committed to that. Will the Gallant government assure us now that New Brunswick veterans—modern veterans—have priority at our veterans hospitals?



**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** As we know, the Department of Veterans Affairs Canada has the mandate to oversee the health and well-being of veterans. In New Brunswick, long-term care residential-setting options for veterans are shared by the Department of Social Development and the two regional health authorities.

There are a total of 227 Department of Veterans Affairs Canada long-term contracted beds in New Brunswick, 40 of which are distributed into four nursing homes across the province. The remaining 187 beds are shared between the two RHAs in four locations. The DVA beds within the RHAs are staffed and managed by each respective RHA, the regional health authorities. One unit of 20 beds is located within the Campbellton Regional Hospital, and the other three locations are in Saint John, 80 beds; Fredericton, 47 beds; and Moncton, 40 beds. These facilities are owned by the province, and we are working with the DVA to ensure that we have the best service possible for our veterans. Thank you.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** Can the minister tell us, of those 227 beds that are available, how many are full now with DVA patients and how many are occupied by citizens in New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** I will continue with my answer. The admission criteria is determined by the Department of Veterans Affairs Canada. Those criteria have nothing to do with the province of New Brunswick. Let us be clear on that. They can yell and scream all they want. This is clearly a federal issue.

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides the financial assistance to eligible veterans for long-term care. Factors are taken into consideration, and I do want to state that these factors are determined by the federal government and include health care needs, service-related disability, income, and military service. These factors, once again, are determined by the federal government and are used by the federal government. We have nothing to do with that, but we are here to collaborate with the federal government to ensure that our veterans are treated fairly, properly, and with dignity. Thank you.

## Health Care Services

**Mr. Higgs:** It seems that the minister does not really have an answer to that question, but that is what we are used to from the government.

The people of New Brunswick are enduring the longest hospital wait times in the country, and they have gotten worse by over two weeks in just the last year under the watch of the Premier. Wait times now average over 41 weeks. What is the solution? Oh, another spending announcement—\$25 million. What are the details? There are not any details. It was verified yesterday that there are not any details. We will just throw it out there because there is an election.



Spending without results is a common theme here because there are never any results tied to anything this government has spent money on, other than poor results. That is what they call an investment—poor results, but will it help them win election votes? It is a sad day in New Brunswick when we cannot see results for all the money that is being thrown around in this province.

Also, I would invite any member on the Liberal side to explain whose idea it was to have a hospital treatment room tied up yesterday for the Premier to make another election promise—another promise without any results but promised because of the news item.

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** When we talk about poor results, I remember the years of the former Conservative government, when it was contracting the economy with deficit after deficit after deficit. We are tackling this very important issue regarding wait times. We are tackling it, contrary to the leader opposite, who did not do anything while he was Minister of Finance.

That announcement yesterday was but another example of the things we are doing to address wait times and other very important initiatives within our health care system. We are going to hire more family physicians. We are going to hire more specialists. These are clear issues that we are announcing, and we will give more information during the estimates. That is why we have estimates—to give out those details. The members opposite will have the opportunity to ask all these questions, and I will be happy to answer them. Thank you.

## Taxation

**Mr. Higgs:** Is it not sad that after four years, in the fourth year of its mandate, the government is going to do this, it is going to do that, and it is going to do a little bit more? What it is going to do is spend a whole lot more money without results. That is the only thing we have seen that it can do well—spend money without results. After \$1 billion in new taxes with nothing to show for it, New Brunswickers have a right to be skeptical. Was it not the Premier who often said that we were going to ask people to pay a little bit more? Well, over \$1 billion is not a little bit more. It is bankrupting our province.

It might help if the Premier would explain what value taxpayers have received from the extra \$1 billion he has taken. That is an average of \$3 000 per household. New Brunswick families can all relate to \$3 000, but this government cannot when it comes to trying to buy the next election. New Brunswickers can account for spending \$3 000. Can the Premier account for the extra \$980 million he has taken over the past three years? What do New Brunswickers have to show for it? Only less money in their wallets.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** There is a lot of yelling over on the other side, but I would like to throw a question back. The members opposite promised, in their final year, lots of cuts. They would somehow save \$36 million on education. We have invested record amounts in education, in



health care, and in growing the economy and jobs. We have seen lots of results. We have seen good results in the school system. We are seeing economic growth where we have turned things around, and we have cut the deficit in half. We have been meeting targets.

What did we see for the tax increases of the previous government? We saw missed targets, we saw an economy retracting, and we saw nothing but promises of more cuts. In fact, there were real cuts. We do not take that approach. We are about investment in things that are important.

**Mr. Higgs:** You can count on an answer to any question, and the answer is always the same for any issue: We are creating record investments. We have record investments in education—we are eighth in the country. We have record investments in spending your tax dollars—we are last in economic growth. We are tied with Newfoundland for last place. We are last in health care services. We have seen wait times drop right now, and the government is trying to throw more money at that—no results. Spending is at record levels—no results.

In 2014, the Premier said that New Brunswickers were “taxed out”. Then, he got elected and taxed them another \$1 billion—\$980 million, to be precise, an average of \$3 000 per household. Does the Premier recall saying that—that New Brunswickers were taxed out? Does the Minister of Finance recall saying that New Brunswickers were taxed out or hearing the Premier say that?

The speaking points are not enough. It is time that people thought with their brains about the situation the province is in. Minister of Finance, throw the speaking points away.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** We are very proud of our budget that works for all New Brunswickers. We just differ from the members opposite. We are about investing. We listen to New Brunswickers and invest in what they tell us are their priorities. We have a good record of doing this, not just in the year of the election but in all the years of our mandate. We do not use austerity and cuts to grow. We make investments, strategic investments, to grow.

As the Premier asked yesterday, we on this side of the House are all curious as to where that \$300-million mystery money would have been taken from, and we are very afraid, going forward, about where the opposition members anticipate they would, if they should form government, take this from. We will not do that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, minister.

**Mr. Higgs:** Maybe it helps to talk softly.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.



## Budget

**Mr. Higgs:** Moody's Investors Service calls the latest budget credit negative. Dominion Bond Rating Service is concerned by the budget and questions the credibility of the multiyear plan to return to balance because the deficit is going back up. TD Economics says: "The cost of servicing debt will undoubtedly climb, and with it place increased pressure on government finances." RBC Economic Research says: "we are disappointed that the province is allowing the deficit to rise this year and is postponing the elimination of the deficit". RBC, TD, Moody's, and Dominion Bond—all are critical of this budget. Is it not interesting that all these credit agencies are all wrong and the Premier and his colleagues are all right about the future issues of our province? It is time to take the blinders off, face reality, and spend for results. Will the minister agree that results are not happening with the dollars being spent?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** In direct answer to the question, no, the minister does not agree that we are not getting results. We are getting results. We are cautiously optimistic.

However, it is very important that we point out that at the end of the day, we are not apologetic about the decisions that we made for our budget. In fact, we were very strategic. We have made an agreement to delay the return to balance by one year. We did not throw our plan away. We agreed, with careful decisions and from listening to the priorities of New Brunswickers, to delay the surplus by one year. We did this to respond to what New Brunswickers said are urgent priorities—to invest in seniors and health, to invest in youth employment, and to invest in economic competitiveness, given the challenges that we face that are very urgent. On top of this, we have continued to invest in education, health...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, minister.

**Mr. Higgs:** Cautiously optimistic—that is a start. That is a start. Maybe listening to all the experts that are saying they are more than cautiously pessimistic... They are really concerned about where the province is going.

[*Translation*]

Would the premier agree that \$3 000 is a lot of money to take from New Brunswick families, since they are already being too heavily taxed?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** They had a retracted economy while they increased taxes. They did not meet their targets.





We have been exceeding our targets. We have turned our economy around so that we see growth consistently, and we are getting things done in New Brunswick. We were very pleased to be able to have a very generous HST return for New Brunswickers who need it the most, and we stand by this. The decisions that we have made have shown results. We are proud to see that we have the highest population ever in New Brunswick, we have economic growth, we have retail sales growth, we have more housing starts, and we have lower unemployment. We are getting things done.

## Education System

**Mr. Holder:** Let's try this one more time. I would like the Minister of Education to provide us with three dates. That is all we are looking for. First, will the Minister of Education advise this House on when he learned that the education testing had been canceled?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** Here we go again—another doom-and-gloom mantra from the opposition.

(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** We are so frustrated to listen to those members always trying to find a negative. What I want to talk about here today is all the positive investments that we are making in education. From investing in mental health to investing in our classroom composition, to investing in making sure that we have the best technology in classrooms, and to investing in making sure that children have a chance to see the rest of the world, we are making investments in the right place and we are seeing the results. For the first time in six years, we are seeing a doubling in our test results.

What we have here is an opposition again trying to make a political point about something that is not there. The member knows the answer to the question. It is not there. What I am saying here today is that I will continue to talk about the positive things we are doing—investing in education, working with our educators, working with our parents, working with our business community, and working with everybody to make education the best in New Brunswick. That is what we are doing right here.

**Mr. Holder:** Still no answer. Let's ask him for a second date. Will the minister provide us with the dates that the tests will be rewritten so that we can check and make sure that it is actually happening?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** We will continue to work with our specialists in education who deal with test results. Yes, we know that one test result was not put in, and there is a good reason for that. You were already given that reason. We will continue to work with the specialists who are very highly specialized in our education system and who take this work to heart. Right now, what you are trying to do today is to embarrass those specific people, and that is wrong.



**Mr. Speaker:** Speak through the Chair.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** What is happening here, again, is a doom-and-gloom mantra from this opposition that wants to find a negative in everything across the board. We are very proud of the record investments that we are making here in New Brunswick. We are doing everything that we can to work with our community to advance the province, whether it is through education, postsecondary education, health care, working with our seniors, or working with our youth to provide jobs. We are proud of our record investments to see actual positive results, and they are proud of their negative results.

**Mr. Holder:** We are looking for three simple dates. I do not know why he cannot answer the questions—three simple dates. I do not know what he is afraid of. Mr. Smith has gone off to Washington today. He has nothing to be afraid of. Answer the question. The third question is this: Will the minister give us the dates that the test results, once they are done, will be made public?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** Again, admitting that someone is missing from the Legislature... We are proud of our Premier who is off to Washington.

What I want to say again today is that I will work with the opposition any day to make sure that we can provide a positive thing going forward for education. What is frustrating here every day is that we see the opposition trying to find political scores to make a headline. It is not working because people know better. Ask those educators around the province to see the record investments. When I tour from school to school to meet with those people, I am very proud of the record of these people who are putting their hearts and souls into making sure they have the best education system for New Brunswick students.

We have the other provinces looking at New Brunswick as an example and asking: How are you guys doing that? We are doing things that are actually innovative, and we are very proud to work with the other Ministers of Education from around the country to share those best practices. I wish we would share those too.

[*Translation*]

## **Forest Management**

**Mr. Coon:** Today is February 7. Four years ago, to the day, the Conservative government signed a unilateral agreement with J.D. Irving to drastically increase timber harvesting on Crown land. Trees that provided a habitat for wild animals and prevented streams and rivers from overflowing are being harvested.





New Brunswickers are shocked by all the clearcutting. New Brunswickers are furious about glyphosate spraying, and they are fed up with flooding and the havoc wreaked by erosion. Why has this government not done anything to alter such a destructive forest management plan?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** It is certainly good to talk about a traditional industry in the province. Job creation and economic growth are very important to New Brunswickers. At the same time, we have to realize the important role that the forestry sector plays in the province. It is a contributor to our economy, and we all need to work together to get it to where we are.

The interesting part that the member opposite brought up... I am understanding that the Leader of the Opposition is talking now, as he is going into the election period, about reviewing the forestry plan and having a look at it for a second time. At a time when we are seeing record investments—we are coming close to \$1 billion in investments in this province's forestry sector—now he is talking about reversing that or making some changes to it. I do not understand what he is getting at with that part of it, but I think every man and woman in this House should be standing up for everybody who is in the forestry sector, for every single...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Mr. Coon:** We have had four years now of experience with this destructive and unfair forestry plan, which this government promised to review. It broke that promise. New Brunswickers have had it with all the clear-cutting. New Brunswickers have had it with all the glyphosate spraying. New Brunswickers have had it with governments that refuse to stand with them but choose to stand with billionaires. What does this get us in return? It gets us washed-out roads, destroyed bridges, deer plaguing our neighbourhoods because there is no habitat for them in the woods, woodlot owners whose livelihoods have been undermined, and a 20% tariff on independent sawmills when there was none before. Who is in charge of managing our forests? It does not appear to me that it is this elected government any longer.

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** The innuendo that comes from the Leader of the Opposition is somewhat disturbing. I do not know whether he gets how we grow the economy, how we pay for the social programs, how we pay for education, and how we pay for health care, which are some of the priorities of New Brunswickers. The interesting part is that when he comes into the House, he talks about the need for increased wages, social assistance, new things for apartments, new apartments, housing, foster care, shelter care for women, access to health care, better senior care, and the list goes on. Where does that money come from?

He talks about billionaires. At what point in time in the province do we sever the cord of discussions with any companies, whether they be large companies, small companies, or medium-sized companies? Does he realize that many companies started in a back garage? I know that...



(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** He was upset when we were talking about Cooke Aquaculture...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, minister.

**Mr. Coon:** The minister can deflect all he wants, but it does not change the fact that the government here lacks the courage that Louis J. Robichaud had to stand up to K.C. Irving when it was necessary to do so.

(Interjections.)

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

**Mr. Coon:** He refused to let himself be captured by corporate agendas, unlike this government. Instead, we have had no changes to the unfair and damaging Tory forestry plan, there has been no accommodation for First Nations, we have no enforcement of the proportionality provisions in the *Crown Lands and Forests Act* for woodlot owners, and the government even got rid of the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Branch at Natural Resources. Why? He was trying to do his job to conserve wildlife. Can the minister tell us exactly what his job is?

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** You know, every large business in this province started very small—very small. Cooke Aquaculture is now a global leader, and three people started that company in a back garage. K.C. Irving, whom the member just mentioned, started out with a garage in Bouctouche. When he started to get some entrepreneurial spirit and decided that he was going to start growing, was that the point when we should have cut him off and said there would be no more talking? I do not care whether they are small businesses or large businesses. We need to have discussions with them.

On the topic of what the member is talking about, the forestry sector, there are many silos that we need to break down. The only way we can break down silos is to have discussions, meaningful discussions, with the harvester right through the process to the marketplace. We are in a very global, competitive society, and we need to work together to get it right and to make sure that things are going properly for this sector because it continues to contribute to the economy of New Brunswick.

## Opportunities New Brunswick

**Mr. K. MacDonald:** Next week, we begin the estimates process. In order to do our work, we need the information from government for examination. We have yet to receive an annual report from Opportunities New Brunswick. Will the minister please explain why there has not been an annual report issued by that Crown corporation?



[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Landry:** I thank the member opposite for his question. I am very pleased to inform you that Opportunities New Brunswick has had another productive year in terms of attracting new investments. You have heard people talking throughout the province about the excellent work done by...

[*Original*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Stop the clock, please. We are getting complaints that there is no interpretation on that. Can you ensure that you are going from French to English? Can you restart your answer, please? We will put the clock back to zero. I will add 16 seconds. Proceed, minister.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Landry:** I am very happy to answer this question about the work carried out by Opportunities New Brunswick. We have had a productive year in terms of attracting new investments.

We have also helped many businesses—over 350, I think—to increase exports. You know how important it is for economic diversification in New Brunswick that our businesses be knowledgeable and explore new markets. We have created jobs in several businesses across the province. The target of 1 900 jobs that we promised to reach for the 2016-17 fiscal year has been more than exceeded.

The annual report will be tabled soon and will also include the actual job creation data for the 2017-18 year.

[*Original*]

**Mr. K. MacDonald:** There was 16% longer time to answer the question but still no answer.

Who has to give final approval in order for the Opportunities New Brunswick report to be issued? Does it have to be passed through the extinct Jobs Board? Does it need to be approved by the Premier? Is this why there is a delay? Has it not yet received political approval?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Landry:** I will take this opportunity to tell you about the excellent results achieved by Opportunities New Brunswick. We are experiencing the strongest economic growth seen in New Brunswick in many years—many years. From 2011 to 2014, the economy shrank. Since 2014, our gross domestic product has increased, and we are very proud of that. There are new jobs.



I even sense renewed optimism in our businesspeople across the province, and that is because we are also looking after small businesses. We have lowered the corporate tax rate from 4% to 2.5%. We have reduced the deficit by 50%. We have increased the small business investor tax credit from 30% to 50%. We are getting results.

[Original]

**Mr. Speaker:** The Minister of Health is going to stand and answer a question that was taken under advisement.

### Government Contracts

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** Yesterday, I took a question under advisement from the member for Fredericton South pertaining to the New Brunswick prescription drug plan. This morning, I would like to respond to the question by saying that the contract to manage our New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program is purely an administrative one, meaning that there are no key performance targets or indicators. This is purely a straight administrative contract. Thank you.

**Mr. Coon:** I guess I am surprised. I appreciate the minister responding in the House today to the question that he took under advisement, but I am surprised, given that this is an administrative contract, that there are no performance indicators for how well Medavie is administering this contract. The question remains: Will the minister table those contracts—there are two of them—in this House, or will he not?

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** Concerning the release of the contract, we can put it through the proper process if the member wishes. However, I would be more than willing to invite the member opposite to the Department of Health to sit down with officials and with me to discuss the matter. Thank you.

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

