

March 16, 2018

[Original]

Carbon Tax

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, you are so correct. After the expressions of warm sentiment on both sides of the House and the recognition of the great work that the people on both sides of the House who are now leaving have done, it is a testament, I think, to the potential that exists for how much we could actually deliver for the province.

Anyway, I will get right to it. Yesterday, the Environment Minister advised the House that the Gallant government's carbon tax scheme "is not a new tax". This lines up with the federal minister's statement last December that this scheme "does not create a new incentive to cut carbon pollution". That means that the Gallant government's scheme is not and will not be acceptable to Justin Trudeau, and the Premier knows it. Is he able to prove otherwise? Will the Premier agree to write a letter to the federal Minister McKenna to request a ruling on his carbon tax scheme by August 1, before the election campaign officially begins?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I also want to thank our seven colleagues who will not be running in September; we wish them the best of luck. The other political party leaders in the House and I will certainly deliver our speeches later, and I am sure we will mention them all. However, I do want to emphasize this at the beginning of question period.

Obviously, on our side of the House, we extend many thanks to our Liberal colleagues for their work in our caucus. There are also those who were Cabinet members. Of course, we wish the best of luck to the two opposition members who will not be running in the next election. They are also very competent people, and we wish them the best of luck.

Climate change is one of the most important issues facing humanity. It is one of the most important issues facing our generation. Yes, we have a plan, with over 100 actions that we will undertake to combat climate change. They include a mechanism to establish carbon pricing that works for New Brunswickers.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: The question was around whether this lines up or does not line up with the federal minister's statement. The fact is that the statement from the Minister of Environment does not line up. The federal minister says that this "does not create a new incentive to cut carbon pollution". The question is this. The Gallant government scheme is not and will not be acceptable to Justin Trudeau, and the Premier should know that. Is he able to prove otherwise?



Will the Premier agree to write the letter to federal Minister McKenna and request a ruling on his carbon tax scheme by August 1, before the election campaign officially begins? The people of this province have the right to know. Is this government deferring the issue until after the election? The people have the right to know what is going to come down the pike from the federal government and what scheme will be acceptable. Will the Premier write that letter to the federal minister? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Climate change is the most significant challenge facing this generation. It is the most significant challenge facing humanity. We all have to step up and do more, and that is why our government has put an action plan in place to combat climate change, with over 100 actions that we will undertake to ensure that we do our part in this province. One of those actions is indeed putting a price on carbon.

We have made it very clear since the beginning that we would put a price on carbon in a way that respects New Brunswick's challenges, realities, and economy. We have put in place a plan that will ensure that large businesses, large corporations, and large industry will pay their fair share. We have put it in place in a way that will ensure that the consumers do not have to pay more. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to support our mechanism and stand up to the federal government with us, ensuring that this plan moves forward over the next few years.

Mr. Higgs: I thought I just heard that this is revenue-neutral. The Premier said "in a way that will ensure that" New Brunswick citizens "do not have to pay more". Would the Premier clarify that statement? Does that mean that the carbon tax will not increase in any way the cost to the consumers? Does that mean that consumers in this province will not see an impact of the carbon tax and that it is indeed being proposed by this government as a revenue-neutral plan, as was the original intent? Thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As much as the Leader of the Opposition is trying to pretend that there is some gotcha moment here, it is very clear—and it has been very clear for quite some time—that we have put in a mechanism to put a price on carbon that will work for New Brunswick's economy. Within that mechanism, we are going to ensure that industry, large industry, will pay its fair share. We have said that from the beginning, and that is still the case today.

With that said, there will be no carbon price increase when it comes to consumers. The reason for that is that we already increased the gas tax and diesel tax in this province. We already have one that is higher than Alberta's. Another reason we put the plan in place is that we are actually hitting our 2030 targets already. Manitoba, as an example, is not doing that. Another thing about our plan that we are proud of is that we will phase out coal by 2030, given that we have the right support to do so from all the stakeholders. It is something that Nova Scotia has not done. We are at the forefront in our efforts to combat climate change.

Mr. Speaker: Time.



Mr. Higgs: It is nice to hear the Premier again finally admit that we are currently meeting our targets for 2030. That is a good recognition that was a long time coming.

Then there is the case of the carbon tax and the adjustment that has been made to that in the sense of \$37 million out of our gas tax is going toward the carbon tax formula—\$37 million. But the Minister of Environment was quoted as saying that the new carbon tax will bring in \$200 million. I would like to know where the difference is going to come from over the coming years. If it is \$200 million and all we are getting from the gas tax at this point is \$37 million, what is the plan? Thank you.

(**Mr. Bernard LeBlanc** took the chair as Deputy Speaker.)

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I do not think that the Leader of the Opposition has been listening to question period over the past few weeks. First, when we had a debate about the mechanism to put a price on carbon weeks ago, if not months ago now, I made it very clear that we are very proud of the fact that we have already reached our 2030 targets to reduce emissions.

In fact, had he been listening months ago during question period, we said that because we have met our 2030 emission reduction target already, because we already have a gas tax and a diesel tax that are higher than those of, for example, Alberta, which is the province that the federal government used to develop its backstop, and because we have a commitment to phase out coal by 2030 if we get all the stakeholders to give the support that would be needed, unlike Nova Scotia, we believe that the plan we have put forward, including the mechanism to put a price on carbon, is the right approach for New Brunswick and will be accepted by the federal government. It will see that we are getting results and ensuring that there is a price on carbon in a way that respects our economy.

Mr. Higgs: We did not get the answer. We have conflicting statements. We have conflicting statements from the Minister of Environment saying that it is a \$200-million carbon tax. We have \$37 million of it accounted for, and we have a big gap. There is something missing once again in not telling the whole story, which has obviously been a characteristic of this government.

Given the fact that the minister has said that it does not create a new incentive to cut carbon tax—that is from the federal minister—if they impose the federal rules, does the Premier know how the federal proposal, if imposed, will impact New Brunswick in relation to other provinces that have developed their own plans? Thank you.

(**Mr. Speaker** resumed the chair.)

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Clearly, the Leader of the Opposition has not taken the time to read up on any of the material that explains the mechanism. He has not taken the chance to listen to us in question period and to the explanations, or he has not taken the chance to read the Act that we passed in this Legislature. The reprofiling of the gas tax will increase over time not only because



we want to ensure that it is not just a gas tax that is going to be ensuring that we curb some of the behaviour when it comes to consumption and emissions but also because we want to be investing more and more every single year in other initiatives, such as energy efficiency, that will help us combat climate change in this province.

Every question that he has asked has been made public. The answers have been made public. He has clearly not done his homework, or he has done his homework and is ignoring it and is trying to gain political points here today in the last sitting of the Legislature. I can tell you that we take our role in combating climate change seriously and we will do it in a way that respects New Brunswick's economy.

Mr. Higgs: Divert and deflect. Am I to believe, then, from that statement, that the \$200 million that is supposedly coming from the carbon tax formula will come from our gas tax? Does that mean that money is going to be diverted from communities and roads—taken from what it was designed to do—and put into a formula that is going to be used as General Revenue for the government? Is that the plan? We are at \$37 million now, and over the coming years, should this government be reelected, it is going to go to \$200 million through a formula that takes away from communities and rural roads. Is that the plan?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to say it is ironic to hear the member opposite talking about the need to invest in rural roads. This is somebody who slashed the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure when he was Minister of Finance and somebody who has gotten up time after time in this Legislature to lecture us about our investments in infrastructure. For him to have the audacity to get up and pretend now that he wants us to be investing in rural roads is rich.

Luckily, our government, since it took office, has been investing strategically in our infrastructure to create jobs, to ensure that our roads and bridges are there for businesses to get their products and services to markets around the world, and to ensure that people can travel our province safely. I am pleased to announce in this Legislature that yesterday we signed an agreement with the Trudeau government where we will be investing \$673 million of federal government money into the economy, into infrastructure in this province, over the next 10 years.

Mr. Higgs: This \$200 million is the number of the members opposite. It is not my number. It is their number, and the only part of it they can account for is \$37 million, because the rest of it is a mythical plan that goes well beyond 2019. After all, the whole program was shifted to get through the election. Did they have a commitment from the federal government? Where is that \$160 million that is not identified coming from?

There are conflicting statements. The Minister of Environment said that there was a \$200-million carbon tax, and the Premier can only account for \$37 million of it. There is \$160 million out there somewhere. Is that the surprise for 2019, should this government again become the government? Let's hope not.



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have been very clear about the fact that we have a gasoline and motive fuel tax that is already higher than the one in Alberta, the province that the federal government picked as backstop for all provinces in terms of the mechanism to be used for establishing carbon pricing.

I want to repeat that we have made a commitment. Essentially, we agree with what the member opposite is trying to say: We have made a commitment to invest more in programs that will help us fight climate change and mitigate its impact. We are doing that for the following reasons: It will help us create jobs, stimulate the economy, and ensure New Brunswick plays its role with Canada in fighting climate change, the most significant challenge currently facing humanity.

Health Care

Mr. Higgs: I committed to reviewing the Extra-Mural Program agreement, which this government signed with Medavie, to make sure that New Brunswickers get the best service possible for their money. However, the data that recently became public regarding Ambulance New Brunswick lead me to believe that such is not the case. Did the Premier have the Ambulance New Brunswick data before he signed the agreement with Medavie?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I am pleased to rise in the House to respond to this question because, according to Ambulance New Brunswick data, ambulances are off the road from time to time; it happens. Has there been an increase? Yes, there has been an increase. However, there is no need to exaggerate as the opposition is doing, because, on the one hand, we consider that, 97% of the time, ambulances are on the road as they should be. On the other hand, what is the most important? Is it that the ambulances are off the road or that the contract and schedule must be abided by? The good news is this: The contractual obligations are met over 97% of the time.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: I will ask this similarly again. I have committed to reviewing the Medavie extra-mural contract signed by this government to make sure that New Brunswickers are getting the best service possible for their money. The data that we received that became public regarding Ambulance New Brunswick makes me believe that we are not. Did the Premier have this Ambulance New Brunswick data available before he signed the Medavie deal? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I can basically answer the same thing in English. We recognize that sometimes there are out-of-service units. That happens. I think that is what the Leader of the Opposition is referring to. Yes, there has been a slight increase over the past year, but when we look at the data as a whole, we see that 97% of the time the units are in service.



What is even more important . . . It is not the fact that they are in service or not. It is the fact that the contractual obligations are met in the sense that the paramedic units arrive during the prescribed times, and that is what has been happening. Close to 97% of the time, they have been arriving on time at the scene. The contractual obligations are met. Honestly, they are doing a fantastic job.

Justice System

Mr. B. Macdonald: Typical of the Gallant government, it will not acknowledge the problem and it will never be able to fix it. A slight increase? The 55% is not a slight increase.

Another issue that the government members do not seem to care about is this case that has now come to light. A woman was apprehended in Fredericton. She was transported by the province to Miramichi. She never saw a judge. She was released from custody in Miramichi and told to make her own way home from a gas station. The actions of the province took a vulnerable person, put her in an even more vulnerable situation, and put her in a situation where there was great potential for harm. Also, I am told that this was not the only such case recently.

I am also told that previously these people were given bus tickets so that they could get home and that this government has stopped that practice. My question is for the Premier. Is this true? What is the policy, and what is this province doing to ensure that the people that it has taken under care are not exposed to greater risk?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: As you know, we cannot discuss a specific case in a situation such as the one brought up by the member. I can tell you that, for example, when a person is transferred from one correctional institution to another, we do provide transportation for understandable reasons. However, when it comes time to leave a correctional institution, it is up to that person to make arrangements. Officers working in correctional institutions do not, however, leave people being released without resources. They will try to help them find out whether community organizations or programs in the area or family members can do something to help them get home. When a case like this one comes up in our department, I thank the member opposite for bringing it to my attention; I will look into what we can do to ensure this does not happen again in the future.

[Original]

Mr. B. Macdonald: I am glad that the minister is going to take it under consideration, but I would say that the Premier is responsible for his ministers. What we have seen is a pattern of ignoring the problems and of complete arrogance regarding these problems. They are not dealing with them.



We have a Minister of Health who does not seem to care whether ambulances are available and where and when they are available. We have a Minister of Families and Children who does not seem to know or care how often the province is meeting its obligation to visit families under care. We have a Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care who does not know how many residents in special care homes are on the sex offenders list and who seems to think that situation is okay. Now, unfortunately, we have a Minister of Justice, whom I personally quite like, who tells us that it is all right that we get people there and that they have to get their own way back.

When is the Premier going to show some leadership on this? Will he at least ensure that the people whom the province has taken under care get back home safely?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: The member opposite knows me well; as I said, these are things we will look at to see what we can do in such cases. That said, I cannot talk about specific cases.

We are referring to problems like this one: Let's say a person calls 911 and requests ambulance service. The person gets to the hospital this way; the sick person arrives at emergency, and, two hours later, is given permission by the attending physician to go back home. That person will not be taken home in an ambulance. It will be up to the person to find a way to get home.

I just want to show what services are available. For years, services have operated that way. Basically, I am saying that such things happen in all government departments. They are isolated cases, and I will ensure that this no longer happens in the future.

[*Original*]

Mr. B. Macdonald: I cannot believe that the response of the government is to call 911. When we empower a government, we expect it not to abuse that power. We expect it to care for our most vulnerable. When the government takes people into care or custody, we certainly expect that they get home without having further harm come to them. The Gallant government is failing. It is failing people waiting for an ambulance in an emergency. It is failing children in care. It is failing people who are in our special care homes. It is time to turn it around.

Will the Premier at least assure us that when the province takes people into custody, they will get home safely and assure us that his policy, when he grabs them and takes them somewhere else, is not to call 911.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I have tried to explain the situation to my colleague opposite. People are not necessarily obliged to call 911. When we call the number, it is because we are seeking ambulance, police, or other services.



The fact remains that, when a person is released from a correctional institution, as I said before, the administration of that institution will provide the person released from prison the referral list for the area, whether for community services or people to see for housing. There is also the family, if the person has one. The goal is to try to see what can be done to help the person who has to leave prison.

I have said this and I will reiterate: The member opposite knows me; if I say that I will pay more attention to problems such as this one in the future, he knows that I will do so.

[Original]

Special Care Homes

Mr. Steeves: Over the last few days, we learned of a screening process that allows sexual offenders to cohabitate with others in special care homes and we learned that this process can indeed lead to tragedy, when an individual who was residing in a special care home was sexually assaulted. Can the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care please explain the investigation process that would follow an incident like this?

Hon. Mrs. Harris: As the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care, my number one priority is to make sure that we do everything that we can to ensure that seniors and residents are safe, whether they are in their homes, in special care homes, or in nursing homes. The reality is that we do not require criminal background checks for potential residents of special care homes. That has not been the practice for any previous government, nor is it the case at this time in New Brunswick or in any other jurisdiction that we are aware of.

Yesterday, a member opposite asked for information. I have my staff gathering that information, and subject to privacy legislation, we will certainly forward the information to the members opposite. As I said, we certainly are aware, and we are doing what we can do to ensure that we have safety in all the homes that we have here in New Brunswick.

Mr. Steeves: But I was asking for the investigation process, so I will make it more detailed. I want to ask this: Since that time, has the minister met with the N.B. Special Care Home Association or the New Brunswick Nursing Home Association or the Department of Justice, including the sheriff's department, parole officers, and/or frontline social workers, to see whether any of these professionals could offer insight into potential changes that could prevent an incident like this from happening again? Has she met with any of those suggested agencies and departments?

Hon. Mrs. Harris: We continually meet with all the stakeholders that are within the realm of Social Development. We certainly meet with all those different groups. I have personally, and my staff is continually meeting with these groups as well. I have met with the Seniors' Advocate. I have an open-door policy with him whereby he can come into Social Development at any time to work with us and to offer his suggestions.



We need to remember that it is our responsibility to provide care for all of those who need it, regardless of their social or economic status or background. We are going to continue to make sure that we do everything and that we are providing the best possible care in the safest and most secure environment. As I said, we are very open to listening and learning, and we will continue to offer great services here in New Brunswick.

Mr. Steeves: Yes, the responsibility to provide care is obviously there. That is what we are asking for—the responsibility to provide care. The minister said that a jurisdictional search showed that the policy was in keeping with best practices, with no changes. But do you know what? The responsibility to provide care indicates that there should be changes in this situation.

I want to ask the minister this: Since last year, since this incident became known, how many options did she and her staff consider before deciding that the current policy was as good as it gets? She mentioned that she met with the Seniors' Advocate. She did not mention parole officers, frontline social workers, the sheriff's department, Justice and the other departments, the New Brunswick Nursing Home Association, or the N.B. Special Care Home Association. How many people did the minister meet with to decide that the current policy was as good as it gets?

Hon. Mrs. Harris: I take my responsibility very seriously, and I meet with people on a regular basis. I meet with stakeholders continuously, and I am a very open person who makes sure that I am doing the best job that I can possibly do.

I cannot stand in this House today, or can any other member, and say that there will be no crimes committed in the province. The Department of Social Development takes its responsibility to provide a safe and secure environment very seriously. Every new resident moving into a special care home receives an assessment. That assessment includes information on medical and social history to provide the operator of the home with information about the client's needs, behaviours, and care requirements. We cannot lose sight that, yes, sometimes things happen. It is very unfortunate, and I feel terrible about that. But I will tell the member that we have a great group of people running our special care homes and they do great work here in the province.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Schools

Mr. Fitch: A couple of weeks ago, I was at the new Italian restaurant on the corner of Church Street and Mountain Road. I saw the old alma mater there, Moncton High School. As you know very well, it was for sale for \$1 million, and it was reported in the media that Dick Carpenter or his family company had purchased it. I wonder whether the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure could give us an update on that purchase and sale, whether it is closed and what the details on the conditions of that closure would be.



Hon. Mr. Fraser: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. That is a very important historic building in the Greater Moncton region. It is something that we worked very hard on to get a deal. The proponent who signed a letter of offer asked for an extension so that he could continue to do his due diligence. We provided that letter of extension so that he could continue to do his due diligence. We look forward to working with him and working with the community to see that building be brought back up and be a part of the Greater Moncton region for many, many years to come. Of course, one of the things that we in our government have said is that we are committed to investing in infrastructure, and this is another piece of important infrastructure in our province. That is why we on this side of the House worked diligently on this file, to come to a very positive outcome.

Mr. Fitch: Could the minister be a little more specific? I know the playing field, which is about three blocks along Church Street, was separate from the original purchase and sale or separate from the original proposal. Has that piece of property been included and added as a sweetener to close the deal? If, in fact, it has, has it gone through the proper procedures for the disposal of Crown assets?

I know that I am trying to amalgamate two questions here. However, can the minister tell us whether there were improvements to Moncton High School, such as roof repairs? Will those or the heating over the holiday season or in the winter—costs that are borne by the taxpayers—be added onto the purchase price? Is the province going to guarantee any loans to make the purchase price come through for the individual who was mentioned?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I just want to point out two things about that question. First, it was the previous Conservative government that abandoned all hope of ensuring that Moncton High School would stay there for the community and that it would continue to play its historic role in the important downtown core of Moncton. It was our government that ensured that we would figure out a way to do what was necessary to ensure that the building would continue to serve the social fabric and the economy of the people of Moncton.

I just want to say that our government has been focused on the priorities of New Brunswickers. Through our multiyear Economic Growth Plan, we are investing to ensure that we stimulate the economy and create job opportunities for our youth to stay here and for our people to come back here. We are investing in our 10-year education plans, investing in historic programs to ensure universities and colleges are more accessible and affordable, and investing strategically to reduce wait times and improve the accessibility and quality of health care for all New Brunswick families.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

