

November 1, 2018

[Translation]

Small Businesses

Mr. Higgs: There are nearly 25 000 small businesses in our province, which employ about 99 people each. These businesses were among the first victims of the Gallant government when property taxes were increased in its first budget. Can the Premier explain how small business owners can confidently envision a brighter future with his government, given his actions over the last four years?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, small businesses are so important to our economy in New Brunswick, for several reasons. Approximately 90% of New Brunswick businesses have 50 employees or fewer. It must be borne in mind that many large businesses, which hire a significant number of New Brunswickers, started out small. So, everything possible must be done to help small businesses get started in New Brunswick and compete internationally, from here in our province.

We have therefore reduced the small business tax rate by 44% since we took office. We have listened to the other political parties, who are saying that more needs to be done in rural areas and that assistance must be provided to small businesses, too. This is why we are ready to lower the small business tax rate again, here in New Brunswick, to ensure that these businesses can compete internationally.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, small business people were also victims of the Gallant government's land transfer tax hike and the vehicle and land registration increases as well as the impact of the 2% hike to the HST. When the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave this government a C- this year, it noted that the government had not yet determined a baseline by which to set the red tape reductions required by the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*.

I would ask how a small business person who has been following the actions of the Premier over the past four years could have any confidence that his or her business will improve with more of the same government?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Small businesses are crucial to the New Brunswick economy. They provide thousands of job opportunities, and many of the large businesses that employ many people started out here in our province as small businesses, Mr. Speaker. That is why we, as a government, have cut taxes for small businesses in the province by 44%. It is also why we have committed to further cuts to the taxes for small businesses in the speech from the throne,





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where we laid out our collaborative and progressive agenda. The idea to continue to reduce the small business taxes is from another political party. We were listening, and that is why it was included in our agenda. We also want to do more to reduce red tape.

I will acknowledge the principle behind the question of the Leader of the Opposition. More needs to be done. We should have done more over the past four years, and we will commit to doing more moving forward with all political parties, including our Atlantic Provinces counterparts—doing everything that we can to harmonize and reduce regulations for small businesses to be able to thrive in our region.

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, should have done, could have done, would do—we hear a lot of that.

The CFIB singled out the Premier in its 2018 report by stating:

While the Premier is committed to reducing the regulatory burden at the regional level, this leadership has not had a significant impact within the provincial government. Government must adopt a baseline measurement, set clear targets for red tape reduction, and publicly report on its efforts.

The Premier has had two full years since the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act* of 2016, yet there is no evidence—no evidence—of any action that has actually been taken. Again, I would ask how any small businessperson can be expected to have confidence in the ability or in the real intention of this government to improve conditions for businesses to thrive and survive.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, as a former small business owner myself, from a family called the Scholtens that had many convenience stores and other small businesses across the province, I am certainly well aware of many of the challenges faced by small businesses. That is why we have demonstrated how much we appreciate what small businesses contribute to the province by reducing their taxes by 44%.

More has to be done, and we took an idea from another political party to ensure that we continue to reduce the taxes on small businesses. We are willing to work with the Leader of the Opposition to make sure that we do even more when it comes to reducing unnecessary red tape. And, of course, we are making it very public and transparent in the process of doing so. Also, we are eliminating barriers to internal trade.

Last, Mr. Speaker, but certainly not least, we have been making significant investments in education, free child care, free tuition, and helping the middle class with the costs of child care and tuition. This is to help those families, but it will also strengthen the workforce for all businesses to enjoy.





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Mr. Higgs: Small businesspeople have yet another wave of tax and fee hikes facing them. On January 1, some form of carbon tax seems inevitable. CPP contributions will be hiked as well, and the big worry on all their minds is what will happen to WorkSafeNB premiums.

WorkSafeNB premiums have gone from \$1.11 to \$1.48 to \$1.80, and they are expected to go to \$2, \$2.40, or \$2.50 over the coming months. You know, the word “WorkSafeNB” did not appear in the Liberal election platform, in the original throne speech, or even in the new and improved throne speech with extra promises. How can our small businesspeople have confidence if the Premier will not even mention one of their biggest concerns—a concern that has now put us at the very top of the list? It is a concern on which a report has been issued since this summer to deal with this problem, but it has not been dealt with. The delay—the procrastination—is unacceptable.

There is a sense of urgency in the province, and it is not about the Premier staying in office. It is about our province getting onto the road to improvement. How can businesses expect a different result from this government?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have made it very clear that we will support the WorkSafe NB report—the one that will have recommendations to help ensure that it is going to work for workers and that it is going to work for employers and, of course, for the overall economy of our province. We have made it clear as well that we want to help small businesses. That is why we have reduced their taxes by 44%. We want to continue to do so in the collaborative and progressive agenda that we laid out in the speech from the throne. We took that idea from another political party, like many ideas that are in that agenda, to demonstrate that we got the message that we need to collaborate more than ever before.

We, as a government, are focused on growing the economy in a way that benefits as many New Brunswickers as possible. We do not want to grow the economy simply for the rich. We want as many people as possible to benefit. That is why we supported enhancing the CPP, increasing the minimum wage, and advancing pay equity. That is why we want to have free tuition and free child care for those who need it the most and help the middle class with the cost of child care and tuition. That is why we will continue to stand up so that we can grow the economy in a way that works for everyone.

Government Finances

Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I think that everyone in our province, and even some interested observers from around the world, watched in amazement in recent weeks as a government desperate to cling to power made promise after promise. Things that two months ago were considered to be completely contrary to its principles and values are things the government is willing to offer today, simply because the promise of power is so alluring.

Here is one question that I have for the Premier. All the promises that have been made cost money. The Liberals, as the party in government during the election campaign, made a big deal





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of saying that promises had to be kept and that promises had to be costed. I have one simple question: Have any of the promises made since the election campaign been costed, and, if so, can that information be provided to the members of this Legislature?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Rest assured that we are addressing the financial situation, which has always been a priority. That is why we have worked hard on making strategic investments that enabled us to reduce the deficit by more than half and to have a budget surplus—in fact, our first one in 10 years. That is why we had to make decisions that were not always easy; however, we succeeded in growing the economy.

We clearly indicated in our throne speech that we must do more. We listened to New Brunswickers, so we must balance the budget faster, and we are willing to work with the other political parties to achieve this. We are going to make sure we follow our party agenda responsibly and work with people to do so.

[*Original*]

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it is interesting to see the member opposite talk about changing his principles. I remember when he was the Leader of the NDP, talking about how bad fracking was. Now, he sits on the benches with the Conservatives, the one party—the only party, really—that wants to do fracking in this province, so I think that I have no lessons ...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I think that being lectured by the Honourable Premier on anything to do with principles is such an easy target that I will not waste the time of the Chamber by replying to those personal remarks. However, I will say that I am proud to stand here as a member of this party that is actually standing for genuine change in this province, genuine reform. Starting tomorrow, we will begin that task.

What, of course, the Premier did is...The Premier specializes in avoiding and dodging and never answering questions, and when it becomes convenient, he talks about the past but not the future. You balanced the budget? You did not even realize that you balanced the budget. This government did not. It did during the election campaign, and, of course, by the time it realized it had happened, we had already gone back into a deficit situation. That is what comes from having no plan, and I am honoured to stand here as a member of the caucus of the member for Quispamsis, who has a plan and will get moving on that.

In the meantime, can I ask how the Premier intends to balance the books a year earlier when he has added untold tens of millions of dollars to the province's expenses with his uncosted plans over the last few weeks?





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Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I really do appreciate the member opposite saying that we balanced the budget, but I want to correct him because I do not want to have New Brunswickers think that something happened that did not. Mr. Speaker, we did not balance the budget. We did something better, I think. When you balance the budget, you are essentially putting forward your estimates and projections of how the budget will go, and then you will hopefully have a balanced budget when you present that. Really, what we did was the actuals, Mr. Speaker. We actually produced a budget surplus, so we had balanced books, not a balanced budget. It is, in my humble opinion, much better when you have the Auditor General saying that you indeed had a budget surplus because of the performance of the economy and the performance of government in making sure that you are investing strategically.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the speech from the throne, it is an agenda that is laid out. Of course, we want to work with the other political parties to decide the scope of many of the things that we have discussed in that agenda. Deciding that scope will obviously have a very significant impact on the costing, and we look forward to working with the other parties to lay all of that out in a very transparent way for New Brunswickers.

Mr. Cardy: I am looking forward, Mr. Speaker, to next week, to being part of a government that prepares to work in a genuinely collaborative way with members of all parties to prepare a budget that will be balanced and will generate a surplus. That is what genuine economic progress looks like, not a temporary blip in the figures, which the government did not even know was there until the middle of an election campaign. We have to do better than this. We need to have a government that will make promises based on reality and based on a sound assessment of what is required to move this province forward and, not, again, a desperate effort to try to hang onto power at the last minute.

At the moment, we are left, Mr. Speaker, with a simple choice to ask of this government. Either he has no explanation and no answer to the question of how the government will pay for these promises or, as he has shown in the past, he is ready to impose yet more taxes and yet more burdens on the people of this province. Also, as we have seen before, such as in the case of the flood victims who have not yet been paid the compensation they were promised by this government, he could punt the problems down the road and make them someone else's problems so that he can complain about them from opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not sure that this was a question, but I will do my best to discuss the principles raised by the official opposition member.

During our mandate, we did our best, and I am the first to acknowledge that we made mistakes. However, I am still very proud of the fact that we managed to grow the economy every year and reduce the unemployment rate by two points, here in New Brunswick. We also managed to



significantly raise wages, so much so that, in 2016, New Brunswick had the most significant increase among all provinces across the country. We were able to increase the population of our province during our mandate, and we managed to reduce the deficit by more than half, to such an extent that we had a budget surplus.

That being said, although we are proud of these accomplishments, we are the first to acknowledge that mistakes were made and that we have to do better for New Brunswickers. That is why we genuinely want to work with the other political parties so that we can serve all New Brunswickers better.

[Original]

Postsecondary Education

Mrs. M. Wilson: After the Gallant government announced its so-called Free Tuition Program, it did not take long to realize that several major student aid programs had been gutted to fund it. It did not take long to figure out that 40 000 New Brunswick students were worse off because of this program. It did not take long to figure out that a \$53-million fund had been replaced with a \$28-million fund. It did not take long to figure out that 13 000 students who attended private—private—colleges were barred from this program. What I cannot figure out is how the Premier expects these victims of the Tuition Access Bursary to have confidence in his decision making on postsecondary education.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Thank you for the question. I think it is clear that New Brunswick students want to have access to postsecondary education and that they want it to be more affordable and more accessible. That is what our government's decision is premised on. The students' association told us that we must invest when people are in school and that access to education must be improved. That was the basis for the government's decision to create a free tuition program from which over 7 000 New Brunswick students have already benefited.

Postsecondary education is a fundamental value for our province and our society. We must do everything in our power to make it more accessible and more affordable. That is what we have done.

[Original]

Mrs. M. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, it was a neat trick for the Premier to cut tuition funding by \$25 million and get praised for doing it. While the Premier was taking praise, 12 000 recent university and college graduates had student loan debt reduction programs cancelled. Nearly 1 000 students per year were also victims when their Timely Completion Benefit for debt forgiveness was cut. There were 15 000 full-time students and 4 000 part-time students who were also hurt when their tax credits were chopped. How can these people be expected to



have any confidence in the Premier's decision-making ability when it comes to postsecondary education?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, when you govern, you have to make some decisions based on choices. As a government, then and still today, we have chosen to invest through the Free Tuition Program when students are actually in postsecondary education. We wanted to create a program where it was more accessible and more affordable.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the results of that, you see that there are over 7 000 New Brunswick students who are going to universities or colleges, public universities and colleges, who have access to free tuition. I think that we would probably all agree that retaining New Brunswickers in our province is about having access to jobs. That is why we have been, over the years, focused on growing the economy and seeing more jobs created in New Brunswick, and that is what will retain well-educated students and graduates to stay in our province, work in our province, and contribute to our economy and to themselves.

Mrs. M. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, by excluding private colleges—local, independent businesses—from his Free Tuition Program, this Premier risks running some of them out of business. How can private colleges compete with free ones? To me, this is another sad example of government going into competition with independent businesses. How can the people running our private colleges and their students, who have been excluded from this program, have any confidence in the Premier's judgment when it comes to postsecondary education?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, we all know that enrollment in our publicly funded universities and colleges is a challenge, and we all know that the funding to these institutions is also important and challenging because of the decrease in enrollment. We have fewer younger people, and we know that we need to increase our population.

Mr. Speaker, we, as a government, believe, as the student movement believes, that we need to bring in programs when students are actually studying to help them reduce their debt loads. They will not have as much of a debt load only because tuition is going to be free. Also, we will be eliminating the provincial portion of the interest on the loans that they may have. We are also focused on helping these graduates, when they graduate with the highest quality of education, to access the labour force through our youth job fund so that they can enter the labour force with good qualifications and also contribute to the economy.

[*Translation*]

Midwifery

Ms. Mitton: Last week, two hospitals, the one in Waterville and the one in Bathurst, had to close their obstetrics units because of staff shortages. The Bathurst unit is still closed this week.





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Pregnant women were referred from the Upper River Valley Hospital to Fredericton or Edmundston, which means travelling more than one hour in both cases.

Last Wednesday, a Bathurst woman was transferred to Campbellton because of a nurse shortage, while other women were told to go to Miramichi. These women have to make other last-minute arrangements, which adds stress at a time that should normally be one of happy anticipation.

Can the Minister of Health explain how all this could have happened?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Thank you very much to the member for her question.

I must say that we are in fact aware of this situation. We know that obstetrics services are very important for mothers about to give birth. We realize this is a very stressful time for families and especially for expectant mothers.

However, I want to emphasize the following: Nurses require special training to work in maternity units. So, these nurses cannot be replaced by other ones who have not taken this specific course, and that is why these human resources challenges arise. In fact, a specific nurse category really is required at this level. I will be ready to continue with the answer shortly.

[Original]

Ms. Mitton: Mr. Speaker, the government has been saying it would hire more nurses, maybe more specialized nurses, more nurse practitioners, and more midwives for four years now. Yet we have nursing shortages closing our obstetric units and emergency rooms across the province. One way to reduce the burden on our hospitals would be to introduce more midwives around the province for low-risk births. This would allow women to give birth in their communities instead of travelling to hospitals an hour away while also providing a high quality of care. This crisis needed to be addressed years ago. Can the Minister of Health tell me why this government has not already hired midwives around the province to ease the strain on our hospitals? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that I do value the importance of midwives. The member opposite may or may not know that my mother was a midwife, so I truly feel that they bring a lot of value. We are the government that brought in a pilot project for midwives, and we are committing to have more midwives in the system. We added some in our tenure, and we are committing to add more. That is but one of the solutions.

We want to hire more nurses as well. We have a recruitment and retention strategy on this. We know that it has been coming for years. We have been working on it for years. As I was saying in my previous response, these nurses in the maternity wards need specific skills and specific training. That is why we cannot interchange with other nurses. Because of that, we are seeing



the issues that we are seeing now. However, we are committed to hiring more nurses and more midwives. Thank you.

Nursing Homes

Mrs. Conroy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For more than a combined 100 years, two facilities in Miramichi have capably served as nursing homes for over 200 seniors and veterans. Sometime next year, these facilities will fall dormant when two new private nursing homes will open their doors in our city. Mount St. Joseph Nursing Home, formerly the Hotel Dieu hospital, recently received \$10 million in upgrades, while the Miramichi Seniors Home provides not only nursing home care but Meals on Wheels programs and adult care services in our city. Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is this: What alternate uses are being considered by the government for these valuable assets?

Hon. Mrs. Harris: I thank the member opposite very much for the question. Making life better for all seniors in New Brunswick is my number one priority. When we talk about the nursing homes in Miramichi, we know that they have served us well, but the time has come for us in Miramichi finally to have two new state-of-the-art nursing homes.

To the member opposite, I have been working through the department and looking at other options. Whereas these nursing homes that are in existence now do not belong to the government but to the board, it is the board that has the opportunity to come up with ideas about what could happen in these facilities. Mr. Speaker, let me assure you that I am going to work very hard with them to ensure that we have even more opportunities for great programming for the seniors in Miramichi, keeping in mind that it was a Progressive Conservative government that cancelled these nursing homes and, as well...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Roads

Mr. DeSaulniers: Winter will soon be upon us, and, after last year's fiasco, when many roads were not properly plowed in a timely fashion and the salt and/or its alternative that was used did not prove effective, causing a public safety issue, my question is for the minister responsible. Will the government ensure that we do a better job on all fronts in the future, especially with the sand or its alternative? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: To answer this question, I must say that I know there were all sorts of rumours last year. Some regions may not have been as well served as the others. I was just having a discussion this morning with one of my colleagues on the other side of the House. We were talking about salt. It has to be ensured that neither supply nor cartage will be a problem.



This is what we plan on doing this year: We are already having discussions. Things are already well organized. We are actually just about to potentially sign a contract with a salt company.

With regard to the fact that the salt was a different colour last year, tests were carried out. The salt looked a little browner than usual. Tests were carried out by our department. It checked the white salt and compared it to the salt that was not as white, according to its origin. It was the same thing.

At the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, our goal is to make sure that people travel safely on our roads. This year, the salt will be of premium quality.

[Original]

Tourism

Mr. Holland: Mr. Speaker, whether you are a lifelong resident or are very new to the province, it will not take you very long to realize that the riding of Albert is home to some world-class tourist attractions. Whether it be the Hopewell Rocks, Cape Enrage, the Fundy Trail, or a variety of local artisans, the Albert riding is sitting on a tourism gold mine. That is why I am confused. I am confused because tourism is not mentioned in the throne speech. It is not mentioned by name, and it is not even in the job creation and economic growth section—nowhere. So, Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell me if tourism in general or just in the Albert riding is not a priority for this government?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. LePage: Thank you for the question. As you know, New Brunswick has some scenic locations across the province. Yes, you are absolutely correct. I want to reassure the member opposite that his region is, of course, very scenic and needs special attention.

When we talk about job creation, this is one of the strategies on which we have actually worked very hard at the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture. This is one of the reasons we are trying to convert our tourism infrastructure into four-season infrastructure. I think the member opposite and I are very much on the same page regarding geographic location with a view to actually having four-season infrastructure. Unfortunately, yes, the throne speech is where we would usually find what the member opposite is asking for.

[Original]

Carbon Tax

Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that going back and looking at the record and talking about last place... New Brunswick has the privilege of being in last place in many areas, but I do





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not call that a privilege. We are in last place in economic growth. We are in last place or in second-to-last place in education results. We have the longest wait times in health care in the country. We have the highest taxes in the country. We have 6 000 fewer private sector jobs. We have \$1 billion more in spending and \$1 billion more in taxes and, worst of all, nothing to show for it—no real action or real results for the people who are paying the taxes in this province.

Now, the Premier is bringing forward, will bring forward, or thought he was coming forward with a carbon tax proposal that we all knew would not be accepted by the federal government. Now, we know that it is not accepted by the federal government. I guess that the point right now is this: Let's understand this, on one more cost coming to people: Where is the Premier's position on the carbon tax? Is he going to join other provinces, as he said the other day, to fight for this? Does he actually have a position, Mr. Speaker? Let's find that out.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, during the four years of our mandate, we went from where the Conservatives left us with economic growth, which was with a shrinking economy, to growing the economy every year. Under the Leader of the Opposition as Minister of Finance, we saw the economy retract because he was cutting into important programs. Mr. Speaker, during his mandate as Minister of Finance, their government was in last place when it came to economic growth. Over the past four years, New Brunswick was in sixth place. Mr. Speaker, we would like to be higher than sixth, but after starting off in last place, where the Conservatives left us, we are pretty happy that we moved to sixth.

Mr. Speaker, from July of last year to July of this year, we had the largest increase in wages of all the provinces in the country. During our mandate, we had been judged to have the best Internet access of all the provinces. We had the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada and the United States, with three of our cities being among the four most competitive cities to do business in Canada and the United States. We have lots to do...

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier. Question period is over.

