

June 6, 2019

[Original]

Government Contracts

Ms. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, we filed a notice of motion in this House asking for information on all untendered contracts for professional and consulting services entered into by the Office of the Premier or the Executive Council Office since this government took office. The information that we received shows that Savarin Consulting billed \$212 750 for the period from December 18 to March 28 for a chief advisory to the Premier. This is Bob Youden's firm, and we have spoken about this person before. That is a lot of money for three months' work. Can the Premier advise the House specifically as to what taxpayers got for their \$212 750 over three months?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the number seems different from what I can recall. Nevertheless, what I am excited about is what we are creating in government in order to change the culture. It is creating an operational efficiency in government. Something that we have set up there in terms of the chief operating officer is a concept that I am sure most of the opposition members on the Liberal side would not understand. Some should, and they should understand that the purpose of doing that is to get value for the money being spent. What they are going to see, Mr. Speaker, in the same vein, is that we are now able to balance the budget and we are able to move forward in measuring real results. We are setting up six key priorities within government, with health and education certainly being top ones.

However, in terms of improved services in every aspect of what we deliver in government, Mr. Youden is playing a key role in that, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what he has done? He has been very successful in managing companies, getting results, and having those results very visible to his business and to the public. In this case, Mr. Speaker, it will be to the public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, that is not a very clear answer to a clear question. The Premier told CBC Radio in a story on April 9 that Mr. Youden will be paid "by the job". What is that job, in this case, that is worth that much money? Is there an itemized invoice the Premier would like to share with us that would show transparency and evidence of the work done for that job as well as the value for taxpayers' money?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, we will be able to do that. However, I think that what we will do, in the same vein, is that we are going to take every job that was in the Premier's Office and we are going to add all of those up. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? The Premier's Office was full when we arrived. I would welcome anyone over there to come over now and look at all the empty spots. They are not empty spots because people are hidden around. We did not hire a whole herd of people. We have three people who are working very closely with government



officials to change the culture. The members know who the three people are. I will list every one of them.

Also, maybe we should list the number of vehicles that were floating around government, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I am not talking about one, two, or three. I am talking about a bundle of vehicles floating around. We want to lay it all out there. I am ready to lay it all out there, and it will be all the information, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Rogers: I am sure it was thousands and thousands of vehicles.

What is the role of the chief advisor to the Premier? You already have a Chief of Staff. You have a Clerk of the Executive Council and a number of deputy ministers. We know that the Premier has hired other friends throughout government to report back to him. What exactly is Mr. Youden doing that other well-qualified, highly experienced civil servants and regular political staff cannot provide?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is really interesting. Do you remember the regional office that was set up in Saint John and the employees that went around that? Do you remember that? If you want to ask what was being accomplished, I think that we should start right there, Mr. Speaker.

When we want to talk... The member opposite will talk about the many people. Mr. Speaker, we are talking about three. We are talking about three people who are going to get results in the departments. Do you know what is going to happen as we move on? The members are going to see it. It is going to hurt because they are not used to results, Mr. Speaker. They are going to see it because we are going to report on it. We are not going to say: Oh, we are investing your money. You will not see it anywhere, but we are investing. We are going to say: We are utilizing the dollars that you give us to get the results that you demand.

There is a different culture on the move, Mr. Speaker. I know that they do not want to hear that, but there is a different culture. In order to have a different culture, you need to bring in people that have experienced a different culture. I have lived it, Mr. Speaker. This is not my first rodeo. Thank you.

Ms. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, I believe that in estimates, the Premier told us that Mr. Youden would be paid up to \$185 000 a year. In fact, the exact words were "The upper ceiling on the contract is \$185 000 per year". Given the bill for only three months and ending in the last fiscal year, the bill of \$212 000-plus, might we anticipate \$850 000 for the next fiscal year, which is four times that? Will the Premier take this opportunity to correct what he told the House previously?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, they throw out numbers that I cannot substantiate. I know what the contract says, so I cannot substantiate the numbers that are being thrown around here. But that is not unusual. We have seen the opposition throwing numbers around consistently.



Do you know what? I want to talk a bit about qualifications. If you want to talk about Mr. Youden, he is president of the national chamber of commerce. I am not talking about somebody who just showed up. I am talking about somebody who has had a career of success in delivering results because that was the only way he could survive. He had to deliver results, and he did that.

When I talk about other people getting involved, it is to change the culture to a results-oriented culture, one that is very foreign to government. What has happened before, Mr. Speaker, from us coming in as politicians? The Liberals came in and said: How much money can you spend in this area? Well, I have asked for the help of the civil service, and we have some people who are going to help to guide them to get results, not just open another office...

Budget

Mr. Melanson: When it comes to making budget decisions, it is critical that a government is open and transparent, explaining to New Brunswickers how it made its decisions and what it used to make its decisions. New Brunswickers want to understand the consequences for them, either positive or negative, of all decisions. This is even more important because the Premier made some commitments when he ran in the last election and since then that we would see straight talk, we would have evidence-based analysis, and we would see facts.

We tabled a motion to receive all that information. What answer came back was that nothing exists. Can the Premier please look again at this issue and provide all the evidence-based documentation that fully explains the consequences and what he used to make the decisions on all the cuts that he made in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is really interesting. The process unfolds through the budget process, and the member opposite knows full well the budget process that he is talking about. Through that, a lot of discussions are held. I know the members opposite were hoping to find a smoking gun. I know they were hoping to find something that was disingenuous or that was done under the table. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, it is not there. It is not there. They are used to that. They are all used to it. So they have to find out how to dig it up, but they are going to keep digging. Let them dig. Let them dig and dig and spend their time digging because we are going to spend our time fixing New Brunswick.

Let's think about the last six months, not only going back as far as dealing immediately with WorkSafeNB, but also recognizing that we had to balance our budget to avoid an interest charge that might have been \$25 million or \$30 million. We had to find areas where we were spending money and not getting results. That did not matter to the opposition members. Results were the last thing they wanted, other than the results of the election, and that did not work out for them.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.



[Translation]

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, we are very well aware of the process leading to the tabling of a budget, so we do not need the Premier to try to explain it to us today. Here is what we asked: What documents and what facts were used to make the budgetary decisions the government chose to bring forward to the people? We want to know whether the government understood the consequences, be they positive or negative, for New Brunswickers, including students, nurses, First Nations, and especially the least fortunate.

Please, what are the facts, Mr. Premier? You promised to be open and transparent and to give us the facts. Why can you not give us the relevant documents so that we can see what you used to reach your budgetary decisions?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to stand and talk a little about how we budget and how the last government did not budget. I am happy to talk about the \$1 billion more in taxes over the last four years of the Gallant government, which was still going further and further and further into debt. I am pleased to talk about our prebudget consultations, the first time ever that a government has done prebudget consultations with First Nations. We had 140 people in prebudget consultations. We had over 2 000 submissions online, with people telling us: Please, balance the budget. Please, get our fiscal house back in order. We had the chamber of commerce from Moncton, the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, and chambers of commerce from Fredericton and Saint John, all of them telling us: Please, balance the budget, and get our fiscal house back in order. And we did.

Mr. Melanson: Speaking of evidence-based decision-making, when you look at the media budget release that was submitted by the government, you see that under the heading “Growing a sustainable economy”, one of its top bullets—one of its top bullets—for a growing and sustainable economy in New Brunswick was getting rid of the front licence plate. That is one of its top bullets. Can the Premier explain to New Brunswickers what evidence he has that by getting rid of the front licence plate we will see a sustainable economy in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: So, Mr. Speaker, it has now come to that, right? What we are looking at in every category and asking is this: What makes life easier? What do people want that is not going to be something I need to tax them more for and something for which I need to say, Okay, how do I find more money so that I can give something?

Mr. Speaker, what we are looking at is how we can make life easier and simpler for everyday New Brunswickers. There were a number of people who said... There are a number of provinces, the majority of provinces, that do not have a front licence plate. And people were saying: Why do I need to put that on my car?



So, all right. My colleagues here to my right were pushing to get rid of front licence plates as well. We are both getting that from people. I am sure you have heard it too. We did it, Mr. Speaker. But you know, there is a lot more than that. There are a lot more things that will come as time goes on that are based on our listening to the people in the province who ask: Can you make it easier for us to live and work in New Brunswick? That is our goal, Mr. Speaker, because we want them to stay here.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is really amazing to see how many secret deals we are uncovering here today and we will continue to uncover from this Conservative-Alliance government. The Premier is deflecting every question, breaking his promise of giving clear answers to clear questions. It is quite rich to see. Mr. Speaker, the chiefs of nine First Nations in New Brunswick say that they were blindsided by the news that this government had quietly and secretly lifted the moratorium on fracking without their ever being consulted. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs tell us why he has not yet engaged or consulted on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite. Number one, in New Brunswick, we respect Aboriginal rights. We respect Aboriginal treaty rights. We revert to the Peace and Friendship Treaties. We are all treaty people. What I will tell you here today, Mr. Speaker, is that the moratorium is very much still in place. We simply made a regulation that allows us to pursue that industry in one specific area of New Brunswick. Now that we have the regulation in place, we will be fully engaging with First Nations. We have an honour to respect, an honour to respect the Crown, and we have a duty to consult. We are going to be doing just that.

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, I will be going to Hansard to get a copy of what that minister just said because it is not what we are hearing from the chiefs themselves.

“The Mi’gmaq should’ve been engaged on this issue when the Government was just considering lifting the moratorium in the Sussex area,” said Chief George Ginnish of Natoaganeg First Nation and Co-Chair of MTI.

So the members opposite cannot dance around this issue. They did not consult, and they are not even willing to admit it. It is scary to think what else they are going to do. They refuse to listen. It is a one-man show, a one-man show that is dealing with New Brunswick through secrets and a way of hiding things, a way of looking at people and taking things away, but only telling them when it happens. Did the minister even raise this issue of properly engaging First Nations with his colleagues? Did he not think that the engagement should have happened before the rules were amended?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member. Time.



Hon. Mr. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question. I travelled to Ottawa for the Assembly of First Nations meetings that were there in the first week of December. I met with a conglomerate of Eel River Bar councillors and elders. From Natoaganeg, Chief Tyler Patles was there. He is from Eel Ground. There were also Regional Chief Roger Augustine, Councillor Jake Caplin from Eel River Bar, a conglomerate from... Chief Alan Polchies Jr. from St. Mary's was there as well.

At the table at that meeting... It was my first big meeting with some chiefs in the same room, and they asked me whether it was true that we were going to pursue a potential natural gas industry. I said yes. They had a request: Will you make sure that we get consulted? I said that it was my job to ensure that, to make sure and to keep informing government and informing Cabinet of the duty-to-consult process. Now that we have changed the regulation and now that we have the potential to actually pursue the industry, we are going straight to First Nations consultation. Thank you.

Mrs. Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the first time that New Brunswick has a Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. It is unreal...

(Interjections.)

Mrs. Harris: Clap all you like.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Harris: It is unreal to think that the minister can do his consultations over a cup of coffee, name drop, and think that is okay. That is exactly what these leaders have been telling me over the past 24 hours, that they were not consulted. That is the reason that they wrote a media release yesterday. Read it, and understand it. You have not done what you said you were going to do. You have a responsibility to listen to the First Nations people. You are ignoring them, and they are going to show you that. You do need to listen to New Brunswickers, Mr. Premier, but will the minister admit that he was wrong in not reaching out to engage First Nations, which is really the main part of his job?

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. It is not a form of name-dropping. The member asked whether it ever came up, and of course, it did. I wanted to let you know and the House know where that discussion took place. Back then, we had no regulation. There was a moratorium in place on this industry, so it was not even really worth talking about. How can you move forward with an industry if there is a moratorium?

Anytime that Aboriginal treaty rights would affect traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering grounds, we have a duty to consult First Nations people. We are treaty people. We signed the



Peace and Friendship Treaties, and that is exactly what we are going to be doing. This process starts now. We did not even have a regulation until now, so there was nothing to talk about. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. K. Arseneau: Mr. Speaker, according to the Premier, he would have authorized the lifting of the shale gas moratorium in a certain region of New Brunswick. This was done behind closed doors, over a month ago, without anyone being notified and, even worse, without anyone, other than Corridor Resources, being consulted. Given the ease with which the Premier was able to lift this moratorium, I can only note the irresponsibility and weakness of the moratorium left in place by the Liberal Party. One has to wonder whether they really believed in it.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker, in the absence of any consultation or engagement with First Nations, the citizens of New Brunswick want to know the boundaries and to start organizing and voicing their concerns. Since this is the Premier's pet project, my question is for the Premier himself. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell me this: What are the exact boundaries of this region where the moratorium is being lifted on this traditional Wabanaki territory? What communities will be affected—Sussex, Penobsquis, Elgin, and others?

Hon. Mr. Holland: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand and address the member opposite's questions. Yesterday, we heard him refer to Orwell as an author that he reads. Previous to that, we heard about Goebbels. I am getting a little peek into what the member's library contains. Maybe we could suggest some Covey, some Kiyosaki, and maybe the old standby Carnegie—some volumes that are written by possibility thinkers. That is a reflection of what we on this side of the House are talking about here.

Now, I had a chance to sit with all members of this House yesterday. We met in this actual Legislature, and I broke down very clearly that this regulation is something that was put in place to give me the ability to put an exemption in place in a very specific area, that being the Sussex region. This is a return to the footprint where we had been before. I thought I was very clear. I hope that the member now understands that the desire to talk about areas all throughout the province is a moot point because that is not the case. When we do something, we do it right, and we do it specifically.

Mr. K. Arseneau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the book suggestions. I just hope the other side even reads.

[*Translation*]

Period.



[Original]

Our Premier just does not get it. It is time that New Brunswick positions itself for the future, Mr. Speaker, and does not fall back 40 years.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I just cannot understand how the Premier can announce the lifting of the moratorium before consultations have taken place and the five conditions have been met, supported by evidence. It is working backwards, Mr. Speaker; this is a top-down approach and an antiquated and obsolete managerial style.

[Original]

Instead of listening to New Brunswickers, the Premier is once again catering to a select few. In December, Corridor said that in order to expand in New Brunswick, it would need changes in the regulations around wastewater storage, transportation, treatment, and disposal. What concessions has the Premier made or intends to make for Corridor to weaken regulations in order to meet its demands?

Hon. Mr. Holland: Mr. Speaker, apparently, I was not very clear because the member opposite just talked about the lifting of the moratorium. We could not have been clearer. One minister—myself—and the Premier talked about the fact that what we did... I met with all parties, and I thought that I had very clearly explained this. We put a regulation in place that allows me the ability to grant an exemption under the umbrella of the existing moratorium. I would love to meet and talk about it a little bit more, if you would like, but I could not be any clearer.

There are all kinds of discussions about trying to find something to get upset about, but there is nothing to get upset about here because it is the clear definition of walking out the plan that we were very clear about from the time before we were elected. This was a platform commitment. We stood on that. We got elected, and we have been diligently moving forward. I know that is a foreign concept, to be rolling up your sleeves and getting to work, but that is exactly what we have been doing. This is one step. This regulation is one step that allows us to continue the process, working toward all the other conditions as well, our other steps in the process.

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

Immigration

Mrs. Conroy: Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program is not accepting any new applications for endorsement for the accommodations and food services sectors. These businesses are a major part of the tourism sector, which is a major contributor to the province's economy. Under the AIP program, employers were able to bring immigrant employees into



their communities to work and live. Business owners tell me that the pilot project was an easy avenue for businesses to access skilled immigrant workers to fill staff shortages. To exclude these businesses from the AIP program is irresponsible, and it can be damaging to businesses and to the province's fiscal well-being.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour please give me some insight as to why this decision was made?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite. When I arrived in the department, I made it very clear that population growth and the attraction of new Canadians was by far my number one priority. We will have 120 000 New Brunswickers leaving the workforce over the next number of years due to retirement, and we have to fill that void. A large part of that is going to come from the attraction of new Canadians.

What I can tell the member opposite is that already around 50% of the applications we have had under that program have been in the sectors that she is speaking of. We have to make sure that we are diversifying the sectors that we are reaching out to. I might add that people can also apply under the Provincial Nominee Program on top of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot program. There is lots of room to attract people to make sure that we accommodate the accommodations and restaurant industries and have a diverse attraction for new Canadians from around the world.

Mrs. Conroy: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the answer. Can the minister address the concerns of those in accommodations and food services? What is going to be done about the negative effect it will have on their efforts to grow their businesses? What can be done to help promote them?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest to the member opposite is that, as I explained a minute ago, there is still lots of opportunity to attract new Canadians into the sectors to which she referred. I would love to sit down and give her a briefing on the various programs we have. I really do not believe for a minute that the accommodations and restaurant sectors are being left behind here at all, but we need to make sure we are attracting new Canadians from all sectors. I would love to have that briefing with her, and I think she would understand that we are doing some great things there. I look forward to bringing in a new strategy around the attraction of new Canadians in the very, very near future.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr. Bourque: Mr. Speaker, I spoke yesterday about the false hope being generated around the fracking industry. In Alberta, hundreds of natural gas fracking companies have gone bankrupt, largely because of the price of the commodity. Thousands of wells have been abandoned by the industry, and taxpayers and landowners have been left holding the bills. Is the Premier aware of these challenges, and if so, would he like to revise his rose-coloured outlook for this industry?



Hon. Mr. Higgs: What I am aware of is that last night, I had a discussion with Premier Legault of Quebec. He was talking about his \$14-billion project that he is going to build in the northern part of the St. Lawrence River. It is a new LNG plant, Mr. Speaker, with gas coming from Alberta. So that is a pretty big project in Quebec.

What I am also familiar with is a \$42-billion project in B.C. I have talked about that before as well—gas in B.C.

What I also know for a fact is that we have an LNG plant here that could have an \$8-billion—maybe \$9-billion or \$10-billion—conversion. I am not sure what that number might be, but it is serious dollars of private sector money. I would not have to invest a dime of taxpayers' dollars, and I know that is an unacceptable concept to the members opposite.

What do they need in order to provide that sort of investment in New Brunswick? They need a gas supply. And where do we think we might have it? Here in New Brunswick. Let's connect the dots, Mr. Speaker—real dots.

Mr. Bourque: Mr. Speaker, as you know, we have been asking straight questions and have not received any straight answers, even though the Premier had promised he would give them. The members opposite are pretty good at half-truths. In fact, they are so good at half-truths that they even make stickers out of them.

Corridor Resources has even said that with the lifting of this moratorium, it will take several years before we see any investment from it. Earlier this week, we asked the Premier about private sector investment in light of the very bad outlook on private investment here in New Brunswick from the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. Asked for a solution, his only specific answer was shale gas. I will give him a do-over for his answer. Could he try again? The first one was the wrong answer. What would be Plan B for an economic plan? We would like to hear it. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I could have been any clearer in my previous answer. I could not have been any clearer, but in reading from the notes, the member maybe did not hear me because he was too focused on the notes.

If you want to understand what we are doing in order to rebuild New Brunswick—a New Brunswick that people have walked away from, a New Brunswick where people have said they cannot afford to live and where the government has gone wild so they do not invest... What have we seen in real terms? Private sector investment in this province has dropped like a stone. Meanwhile, investing in all kinds of things with taxpayers' dollars was the mantra of the day in the economic development plan.

We had a presentation from Richard Saillant, and I would encourage you to listen to it and to hear it. It is his update from *Over the Cliff?* Mr. Speaker, he is talking about building an economy based on private sector investment. So what are we trying to do within the system?



We are not only utilizing what we have as we are transitioning our economy to a cleaner environment, because that is what we are in, but also building skill sets to look all around the world.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Government Contracts

Ms. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, since I did not get a clear answer yet, I will try again. We know that \$212 750 is what was billed for the first quarter. I am still looking for an answer on this. Can we assume that the annual salary for Mr. Youden for this year will be more like \$850 000—four times what it was in the last quarter?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: What the member opposite does not know is that her facts are wrong. Her facts are wrong, and I will ask her to provide them to me because I will come back here with the real facts, Mr. Speaker. I know that the members opposite will put out any number hoping that somebody is going to run for it. There will be a scrum out there. There will be the fact for the day and the shot for the day because that is all they know, Mr. Speaker. It is: How do we create a headline?

If we want to work on facts, I will work on facts, Mr. Speaker. When I have somebody working in the system to get results, I am proud of the fact that they are in the system to get results. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? What were the results of the downtown regional centre in Saint John, which Mr. Keir was looking after? What did we get for that, Mr. Speaker? What did that CEO bring to the table?

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

