

November 10, 2016

[Original]

Education System

Mr. Higgs: I am excited about the number of classroom teachers who are starting to speak up about all aspects of our broken system. We always knew that they would hold the key to our future success, and we desperately need their help. Their intimate knowledge of the classroom experience cannot be found anywhere else.

When I met with the Education Department about the 10-year plan, I found that the overall achievement levels have been articulated. However, the baseline data and the targets will not be identified until 2018. What an opportunity. This opportunity is to work with the classroom teachers to establish these baselines. I believe that their involvement is critical if we are to establish realistic baselines and targets. Does the Premier agree, and, if so, how will classroom teachers be involved in this process?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am surprised to have the Leader of the Opposition double down on his claims that our education systems are broken. Again, does he not recognize that using that type of language is demoralizing to our students and to our teachers and educators who are working so hard across the province to deliver the best education systems possible to our youth?

[Translation]

I do not know how many times it will have to be explained to the Leader of the Opposition that we developed our 10-year education plan with teachers, that is to say with educators, and with community leaders. We will continue to work with these people, who have shown such dedication to doing what needs to be done to get the results we all want for our young people.

The Leader of the Opposition continuing to say that our system is broken is not helping whatsoever, and I hope he starts using much more positive language with regard to our system.

[Original]

French Immersion

Mr. Higgs: One thing is abundantly clear: The only reason for a change in early immersion is that it is in the Liberal election platform. Early immersion is not being changed because it is the right thing to do at this time. It is being changed because going back to Grade 1 early immersion was in the election platform. Also in the election platform was evidence-based decision-making. The decision on early immersion is not evidence-based decision-making, and it runs contrary to the Liberal election platform. Why will the Premier not wait for the evidence from Grade 3



French immersion before making this change? Why not honour the commitment to evidence-based decision-making? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, the Leader of the Opposition is surprised to hear that our government is keeping its promise. We talked about this very important topic during the election campaign, and we made the commitment to restore the early French immersion entry point to Grade 1.

[Original]

We discussed this issue at length during the last election. We made it very clear that we would put French immersion back to Grade 1. For the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, to talk as if the only reason that we did it is because we put it in the platform is incredibly unfortunate. This is something that had been discussed for years. In fact, many of his colleagues were very vocal, saying that it should be in Grade 1. In fact, the Education Critic of their current caucus said that earlier is better. We based our decision on a report that was done in a nonpartisan, independent way that spoke to hundreds of New Brunswickers.

Mr. Higgs: Terry Seguin of *CBC News: New Brunswick* hosted an expert panel discussing education this week. On that panel, Dr. Barry Miller recounted how Karen Power, one of the two authors of the 10-year plan, went around doing consulting for the 10-year education plan. He said that, when it came to the immersion part, she wrote a piece, and her piece was this: If the government considers a change in going back to the first grade entry, be very careful. It is going to have a negative impact. Do not do it. Review this decision again.

The government just ignored that. Why was this not in the 10-year education document? Is the Premier aware of this? Is the Premier aware of what Karen Power actually wrote?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, I note that, during the election campaign, we had very clearly indicated that we would restore the early French immersion entry point to Grade 1. The Leader of the Opposition rises today, as he has been doing for a few days now, and speaks as if he were surprised. He says he does not understand why this decision was made, and I find that very unfortunate.

[Original]

I ask the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, whether he has, in fact, read the report on the French Second Language Task Force that was done in February 2012 under his government. Did he read that report? It was done by two former Education ministers, one from a Liberal government and one from a Conservative government. It was an independent task



force. It was done in consultation with hundreds of New Brunswickers—teachers included, parents included, and students included. Has the Leader of the Opposition read that report? That is what we are basing our decision on. Has he read the report, and will he tell us what he thinks of it?

Mr. Higgs: One of the concerns that is expressed to me by current teachers who want to help fix our system involves a change to early immersion. They tell me that many of our children do poorly in both languages because so much of the fundamental language arts, math, science, and social studies curricula gets muddled and misconstrued. The teaching of a second language can often be hard for them. They feel that efforts supporting the current French program, rather than beginning a new program in Grade 1, makes the most sense for our broken system. To put it simply, keeping this election promise will make matters worse. Does the Premier understand that?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, the member opposite is trying to use French immersion as a scapegoat for some of the challenges that we have in our education system. It is very unfortunate, especially considering that he ran under David Alward to restore French immersion to Grade 1. That was their promise. For him to act surprised or to make all these grandiose claims as to why we are making this change is very unfortunate.

There was a task force, and he was a part of it. He was a part of that government that commissioned that task force to look specifically at French immersion. It was done in February 2012, and the number one recommendation from that task force was that the entry point for early immersion be Grade 1. This was in 2012, so why is the member opposite using French immersion as a scapegoat, getting up and criticizing something that his government commissioned? Why will he not talk more positively about our education system?

Mr. Higgs: If our education system is going to improve, we need to do things differently. We cannot just keep pretending and writing in an election platform things that do not have an evidence- or fact-based chance for improvement. How many students are graduating who are functionally illiterate? How many do not have the foundational knowledge to carry on into postsecondary education?

Our system is failing our children. Our return to Grade 1 immersion is not supported by teachers, parents, retired teachers, or educational experts. They all offer expert advice on the matter, based on decades of research and experience.

I hope that the Premier will take the time between now and next Tuesday to reconsider his stand, which is based purely on an election promise. I would like to go into the long weekend on a point of agreement with the Premier. Can we at least agree that, right now, we are not providing our children with the education that they need and that they deserve?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I hope the Leader of the Opposition will take the weekend to try to determine where he and his caucus want to go. First off, they criticize and say that we are doing



things differently when it comes to education. We are giving flexibility and empowering our teachers. Then, they say: That is wrong. We need stability. Now, the leader is saying: No, it has got to be different. Then he is saying that the system is broken but we want stability. They are advocating, on the right hand, keeping things as they are. Then, on the left hand, they are advocating that everything is broken.

I really hope that the Leader of the Opposition is going to take time over the weekend to start finding ways to talk about all the positive things that are happening in the province. For him to try to say that our decision to move French immersion back to Grade 1 is based on anything other than the task force and all the teachers, students, and leaders who came to talk to us is very unfortunate. If he thinks there is no evidence for our decision, what does he think of that report that his government commissioned?

[*Translation*]

Nursing Homes

Ms. Dubé: This morning, I am going back to the issue of seniors to ask the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to clarify her position for us in this regard. We know that, when it comes to seniors, we want them to get the best services possible. I understand that this is also what the minister wants.

On the one hand, she said she wanted to fix the system or provide assistance to this seniors' home in Edmundston, but, on the other hand, she said it was not her responsibility to do so. According to her, this should be the responsibility of the nursing home board of directors. I would therefore like to give the minister the opportunity to tell us what she plans on doing to help seniors living at the Domaine des Bâtisseurs home in the Edmundston area get better services.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mrs. Harris: I thank the member opposite for the question. As I said yesterday, the department investigates every complaint, with no exceptions. We did act immediately, and departmental representatives visited the nursing home.

As I said yesterday, the department investigates every complaint, with no exceptions. We acted immediately, and departmental representatives visited the nursing home. They went, and they saw what was going on there. Our government is absolutely committed to transparency and is happy to share information where appropriate. When a complaint is received, action is taken immediately, and that is exactly what we did. A liaison officer will investigate the basis of the complaint to see whether further action is required.



The nursing home administrator is responsible for the day-to-day activities. I believe that the staff are going a great job there. I had the opportunity to visit with them. I saw great things going on in that home, and I am very open to working with them.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: From what we have seen with the Domaine des Bâtisseurs nursing home in Edmundston, such a situation could happen at the home now under construction in the Miramichi area.

Domaine des Bâtisseurs is one of the first homes built according to the new standards. So, the nursing home model is not like it used to be. As a result, I believe all departmental standards must be reviewed, including how to fund these homes and how many employees there should be in these larger nursing homes.

My question for the minister is the following: Given that this nursing home is larger than those built in the past and that the same is true for the one to be completed in Miramichi, is she prepared to review standards on the employee-to-resident ratio for these nursing homes?

[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Harris: I appreciate the opportunity to stand again. The nursing home in Edmundston that we are talking about actually, as I stated before, receives funding for additional full-time employees above the standard for a home of this size. The nursing home needs to look after the day-to-day comings and goings of the home, and it needs to make sure that it receives funding and that it has the employees that are needed in the home. I most certainly will have a look at what is going on.

Right now, we have a Council on Aging that is going to bring forth a great report, and I am open to any suggestions that may help with nursing homes. Right now, we have great things happening in our nursing homes and we have a dedicated staff who are doing a wonderful job.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: According to the board of directors, administration, staff, families, and communities, the number of employees is insufficient. I would like to point out that there even was a heartfelt cry from the administrator, who said more staff was needed.

The former Minister of Social Development, when she tabled her budget, said she actually wanted to reduce the number of nurses in our nursing homes in the province. Therefore, this was about cutting and reorganizing rather than getting more staff.



Is the minister still following the same policy as her predecessor, who is now Minister of Finance?

[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Harris: As I have said, I have spent the last few months visiting 22 of the 66 nursing homes in the province, and I am committed to getting to the rest of them. I am working very hard to schedule those right now. The information that I have gathered in these visits and these meetings will help me contribute to the new strategy on aging that will be released in the coming weeks. I had the opportunity yesterday to speak with the nursing home administrators and their staff, and I told them how proud I am of what they are doing.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mrs. Harris: It is no surprise that we have financial issues in the province, but we are making sure that all nursing homes are working to standard. This nursing home was inspected in June 2016, and the department has assured us that all areas of noncompliance have been addressed. We will continue to do that.

Protection of Personal Information

Mr. Northrup: I think that, yesterday, I caught the Deputy Premier off guard again when I began questioning him on the massive privacy breach involving a stolen briefcase with keys, names of people, and their phone numbers. These keys and personal information belong to 600 seniors and low-income New Brunswickers. Through access to information, we discovered that the focus of the government was to keep this from the public and out of the media until the Legislature rose last summer. It succeeded in delaying our questions until now.

This is a very serious matter. A crime occurred, as the minister said yesterday. We all know that, but have the police caught the criminal? Does the minister know that much? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: No, I was not caught off guard. We expected these questions quite some time ago. I can tell you that the police are investigating. I do not know the outcome of the investigation thus far.

I want to make sure that the blame is in the right position. Social Development staff work very hard to help the people in our province and will continue to do so. I am proud of them, and I am proud of being in that department. Here is an individual who thought that he was doing better. Once the crime occurred, we informed all the right people, all the correct people, and took action immediately. We wanted to make sure that everybody was safe, and we will continue to do that.



When crimes do happen in our province, unfortunate things happen to good people. We will continue to work hard for the good people of this province. A crime has occurred. Crimes continue to occur. I also want to mention that the police do fine work, and, to the member opposite, I will look into the investigation. I do not get involved in investigations, but I know that they do good work for the people of this province. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: I am well aware of our first responders doing great work in this great province of New Brunswick. I do not have to get a lesson on that.

The massive privacy breach is of concern. Of equal concern is the government's focus on keeping it quiet. As I have said, it succeeded, with a one-day story and being out of the media almost entirely. This is putting politics first and the province second.

We must know if the government, along with keeping this information from the public, kept the information from the Privacy Commissioner. It is a simple question. Honesty is the best policy. Was the Privacy Commissioner informed of this massive privacy breach involving 600 seniors and low-income earners of New Brunswick? Did the government tell Privacy Commissioner Bertrand that the massive privacy breach had occurred? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, I answered that question yesterday. Everybody that needed to be informed was informed, including the Privacy Commissioner, immediately. She had no concerns.

Unfortunately, the member opposite needs a lesson in policing, and I am sure that he would like to talk to the member for Carleton-York. When a crime of this magnitude does occur—and we understand that it is a big issue here—you cannot just go out and tell the public what happened. All you are doing is informing the criminals what the keys are for. What is going to happen then? More crime will occur.

The police—and I believe the government, especially—did the right thing by keeping it quiet for a couple of days, until all the locks were changed, to make sure that all the people in this province were safe, including the people at Social Development. Again, we did do what we needed to do. We did not keep it quiet. Unfortunately, that is all you are going to get from the opposition, that this government is doing great work for the people of this province and keeping them safe. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: It is certainly alarming for this side of the House that the Privacy Commissioner had no concerns about this matter. It is silence from the Privacy Commissioner, and this minister stands up and says that she has no problem with what has taken place. That is not what his job is. His job is to keep the people of New Brunswick safe and to let the Privacy Commissioner know about the whole situation. For him to say that she had no concerns... I am sure that we will hear a little bit more about this as we dig into it. Obviously, she has been told, but the minister is saying that there are no concerns.



There are so many questions about this matter. This government and this minister want to put it underneath the carpet and not let anybody get the answers to the questions. It is a formula that this government has used in the last two years and, obviously, is going to use in the future, in the next two years. Let's get all the...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is interesting that the member opposite says that there are so many questions yet he had no question for the Deputy Premier.

I am going to take this opportunity to point out something that I think is unfortunate. Since the Leader of the Opposition took his position, the opposition members have done nothing—nothing—but talk badly about what is happening in the province. They are calling things broken. They are focusing on challenges, some that are real and some that are not even real, that they are trying to fabricate. Why are the opposition members not talking about the good things?

Yesterday, Statistics Canada revised the 2015 GDP growth numbers across the country, and it found that New Brunswick's 1.9% growth was actually a 2.3% growth. That is the best GDP growth since 2004 and the third best in the country in 2015.

Government Spending

Mr. Fitch: On Tuesday, I asked the Minister of Finance about the supplementary employee list and the supplementary supplier list for last year. The minister graciously said that those lists would be given to me. They are for the public, not just for me. The last thing that I did before I asked my questions was to check the Department of Finance Web site under the Office of the Comptroller—that is where the lists are usually produced—to make sure the list had not been put up there before I asked my questions, and they had not been.

This morning, I checked the Department of Finance Web site again, and, interestingly enough, the Office of the Comptroller tab is gone from the Department of Finance Web site. Is the minister aware that another duty has been stripped away from the Department of Finance this morning?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: The member opposite, who has been elected for many years and was in government for a few years, should know that the list he is referring to is public accounts. There are two volumes—Volume 1 and Volume 2. Volume 1 is where all the employees and their salaries are listed, if the salaries are above a certain threshold. Volume 2 is the vendors list. Those two documents are made public through the Office of the Comptroller, which falls under the Treasury Board, and they are normally made public in the second week of December. That is what has happened historically.



I do not know what the member opposite is trying to get at. The documents will be made public when they are ready. Based on historic time frames, it is normally done in mid-December, and we are absolutely on target to make those public, as they are supposed to be.

Mr. Fitch: It is interesting this morning that the President of Treasury Board took that question. He is the one who eliminated the legislation that forced financial information to be provided on a timely basis. The government said that it did not need legislation to do the right thing when it comes to information for the taxpayers and keeping them informed.

However, here we have a situation in which that information is not forthcoming. The taxpayers would be interested to know whether it is \$20 million, \$30 million, \$40 million, or more that has been spent on Liberal-friendly consulting contracts. The supplier list contains the consulting spending information along with other spending information. Why is the government taking so long to produce these lists? What is it hiding? Can the minister tell us that today?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: This government is not taking more time than usual to release these documents. The lists the member is looking for will be released in the two Public Accounts volumes. Historically, these documents have been tabled and released in mid-December. There is no delay, then.

We will be very open and transparent with regard to suppliers who worked with the government in the last year. These are the standards, and our government is meeting them. The document and the information the member is looking for will be released, and he will have the opportunity to look at all these lists and analyze them as he wishes. He also will certainly be able to make all the comments he wished to make. We will very openly and transparently meet standards and the deadline.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: We can put together some of the information on those lists before the government puts them out. Maybe this is why it is hiding and dragging its feet on this. M5, the company whose vice-president posted on its Web site that he helped the government with its election campaign, was awarded the tourism contract for \$25 million. Through right to information, we learned that M5 has received a lot more taxpayers' money.

We also saw Wicked Ideas Media get an untendered contract for the shale gas panel worth \$135 000. Of course, these three members of the panel had a business relationship with the owner of that consulting company. We are curious about the total that has been received by those companies. They are just two, and I am sure that there are more. That is why we need the President of the Treasury Board to tell us this today: When are we going to see those lists, and what else is he hiding?



Hon. Mr. Melanson: It will be at the same time as always. The lists will be made public. I know that the member opposite is trying to throw things around. Contracts that are given to bidders or suppliers are tendered. They are open and transparent. There are laws and rules to be respected, and this government is respecting those rules and laws.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: When the question was asked, the member opposite never actually defined which list, which document, that he was looking for. I do not know why he chose to ask that type of a question. The fact of the matter is that the public accounts documents, Volume 1 and Volume 2, are made public in mid-December every year. You will get those documents like everybody else in the time frame in which it is normally done, in mid-December.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Stewart: I would like to return to the *Telegraph-Journal* article, which states that, in an interview, the Premier “said the dollars from a looming price on carbon won’t be returned in the form of a tax cut. He says that was never the plan.”

Back to December 2, 2015, the CBC reports the Premier as saying that “any carbon tax introduced in New Brunswick will be revenue-neutral, its impact offset by the government giving up tax revenue elsewhere”. As it turns out, the Premier did not actually say “its impact offset by the government giving up tax revenue elsewhere”. That was an addition based upon what everybody else in the world understands revenue-neutral to be. Does the Premier get that, and would he like to offer an apology?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I am pleased to respond to this question, as it seems semantics matter more than content and substance.

You know, our province and the entire planet are facing very significant challenges in terms of climate change. Our province is taking climate change very seriously and is determined to strengthen its plan on the issue.

Therefore, what matters is what we are going to do to meet these challenges. All the opposition is doing is uttering words and playing with semantics, instead of looking at the substance of the issue. I want to clarify that we have always been very clear, and I am going to show this in two ways. We started by saying this: No revenue from a carbon pricing mechanism will be kept by our government. How could this be any clearer?



[Original]

Mr. Stewart: It is clear that the Premier made a promise to New Brunswickers that the carbon tax would be revenue-neutral. It is also clear that we are hitting our targets on carbon and we are hitting them right out of the park, despite whatever reasons got us there. What I want to say today is this: Will the Premier get on his feet and admit to the public that there is a falsehood associated with all this and that he owes the public an apology for, once again, dipping right back into the pockets of everyday citizens of New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is very unfortunate to see the opposition attacking the Trudeau government and its plan to step up to combat climate change. It is very unfortunate to see the opposition calling our education systems broken, attacking a reputable New Brunswicker like John McLaughlin, attacking RCMP officers, and attacking the Social Development workers who are making sure that they do their work and do it properly.

There are good things happening in the province, and I would urge the Leader of the Opposition to get his caucus under control and to focus on some of those things. In 2015, we grew the economy by working with New Brunswickers and the Trudeau government, by investing in infrastructure, and by investing the most we have ever seen in education. That gave us a growth of 2.3%, the third best in the country and the best in New Brunswick since 2004. Compare that with when the Leader of the Opposition was in Finance. The members opposite had the cumulative retraction rate of 1.2%. There is the bad news. There is a lot of good happening in the province.

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

