

November 17, 2016

[Original]

French Immersion

Mr. Higgs: The Premier has given two reasons for the irresponsible change to early French immersion: a report from 2012 and his own election platform. I have already offered my opinion on the 2012 report, that it was very narrow in scope and attendance was by invitation only. The Liberal election platform promise was another ill-conceived idea that was contrary to the 10-year plan, which was also an election promise. Let's pick the one that makes the most sense. I will vote for the 10-year plan.

I am asking the Premier to start looking forward rather than backward. Let's look at the current situation. Children in the Grade 3 immersion program have yet to complete it. Therefore, we have no complete data to support the decision to change the entry point. The Premier's own 10-year-plan author was not recommending this change. Karen Power said: Leave it alone. It will create chaos.

Once again, I will ask the Premier to put our children first and politics second. Will he put a halt to this change to early immersion?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We are putting children first with our 10-year education plan. We are looking at investing the most in education, more than that government ever did. It is interesting that, today, the Leader of the Opposition is talking about trying to do things better. When the members opposite were in government, they cut in education. That is why we are in some of the predicaments that we are in right now. We are going to be honouring our political platform. Regarding letting New Brunswickers know, this is what we got elected on.

We all know, and even the opposition said, that earlier is better. Today, we see the opposition always trying to find a wedge issue and to fearmonger. We want to be able to advance our education system and have the best education system that we have ever seen in the province. That is what we are doing today. We have been talking to stakeholders with the extensive consultation that we have done in the past couple of years. We have done more consultation with teachers, parents, educators, and the business community, and we feel that we are doing the right thing to move forward.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Education System

Mr. Higgs: It is really interesting that, with a program that existed and for which the results were not good at all, we are recycling it and putting it back in. Are we saying that this is



progress? Is that going to move forward? Is it going to get different results? Do we do the same thing and expect a different result?

In less than three weeks, the 2015 results will be released from the Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA. On December 6, we will get these results. This year, the focus of the release will be on science. PISA testing is done with 15-year-old students and gives us an indication of how our New Brunswick results in reading, math, and science compare with the rest of Canada and the rest of the world.

Needless to say, our New Brunswick results have been of much concern for a number of years, under various governments. The results tell us that we need to fix our broken system in order to give our children the education that they need to compete globally. Does the Premier agree that we need to fix this system to give our children the education that they need and the education that they deserve? Our standards need to be higher.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We hear the Leader of the Opposition saying that our system is broken. Again, what we are hearing here today is a disgrace. We have improvements to make, and that is what we are doing. We have been very aggressive every day, saying that we are working on making improvements to our education system, not just in math and literacy but on many other fronts. We are investing more in education than any other government in history, and we are going to have the results proven in the years to come.

If we just sat on our hands on education, as the opposition did for four years, we would never get anywhere. We have to make bold decisions. That is why we are working with our teachers, we are working with all our community leaders, and we are working with different people. We are asking the opposition members to come work with us, but what we see here again today is that they are trying to divide and conquer. We think that this is wrong. We have to have respect for our communities. That is what we are doing, with the proper consultation—working with everybody to make sure that we have the best education system moving forward. Thank you.

Mr. Higgs: The offer to work together rings hollow. I have mentioned I do not know how many times in this House that I wanted to meet with the Premier and discuss how we can build a 10-year plan that lasts beyond elections. I make no excuses. I make no issue with the past performance of any government. We have an education system that is indeed broken. Teachers in the classrooms are telling me this. They are telling me this every day. I am getting new e-mails. You are seeing more letters to the editor. I am seeing it when I talk to teachers. They say: I cannot really talk about this, but this is a problem. I am hoping that the teachers will rise up and really say: I can fix this if you guys will just listen.

The Anglophone East district education council is another voice added to the chorus of concern over the latest provincial assessment results. In that district, less than 10% of the Grade 6 students met or exceeded grade-level math skills on a new provincial test. All the district schools fell below the 2016 provincial average of 20% and far below the province's target of



seeing 85% of students working at or above grade level. Given the enormous public concern, will the Premier make a commitment today to make all the assessment information public?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Again, we see here that he is saying that the system is broken. It is disgraceful to hear this every day from the opposition, talking about our teachers in the province. I have met with teachers. In fact, I was with teachers the other night, talking to them, and they do not really appreciate this. They have said to me: Yes, we know there are some issues right now. We know there are some challenges. However, they want to work with our government to move forward. We have met so many people. In fact, the Premier and I spent a full afternoon with teachers and principals from around the province, and they voiced their opinions. Yes, we have listened to what is taking place, but we made a commitment. We are moving forward with it this year, and we are going to work to put the proper resources in place and make sure that we have the best system possible.

I extend an offer to the opposition to work with me. I know we have had a few meetings before, but, here in the Legislature, getting up and grandstanding and saying that the system is broken is wrong. We need to work together to move forward. They have their opinion, but, at the same time, we cannot be degrading our teachers in this province.

Mr. Higgs: The facts speak for themselves. I am not talking about a system that is working and all the results show it. I am talking about a system that is obviously not working and all the results prove it. That is the reason. We want to talk about developing a 10-year plan that goes beyond elections. I am all for it. Let's do it. I am in. I will meet you anyplace, anytime.

The minister has said just recently in the Legislature: I do not know. Not everybody has to make good marks. Look at me. I am doing fine, and I did not make good marks.

We want better for our kids. It is not about mediocrity. It is about being the best. The education assessments that produced such troubling results need to be examined in great detail. How did we arrive at these results?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Higgs: How did we arrive at this? For the umpteenth time, I understand that the whole assessment process was rejigged in the last couple of years. Will we continue to request an account of the standards that students fail to meet? Will the Premier agree to work with us to get this information so that we can move forward collectively in the right manner?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: On one thing, we will agree. Yes, we will work with you, but, again, we see the negative attitude here every day. We know that we are at a point in time right now when we



see assessments and, yes, we have to improve on them. That is what we are doing. We are working with stakeholders. We are putting the proper resources in place to be able to improve on that. We want to work with everybody in here.

The system is not perfect. We understand that. At the same time, we think that there are some great things happening in our education system throughout the province, in every corner of the province. I have had a chance to move about, to tour around the province, and to meet great leaders in our communities and in our schools. They take pride in what they do.

Yes, we know that there is some stress in the system. We understand that. That is why we are putting the proper resources in place. We are hiring teachers, and we are going to make sure that we have the best curriculum and the best resources in place so that we can get New Brunswickers to learn to the best of their ability. I do believe that, by working together with everybody in New Brunswick, we will have the best education system moving forward—no doubt.

Mr. Higgs: Does working together with everyone in the province include allowing the teachers in the classroom a voice so that they can be heard? If we are going to fix our education system, real teachers from real classrooms must have a voice. Classroom composition is an issue, and it must be addressed. Only classroom teachers can help us understand what the issues are with the composition and how to address this in the best possible way. The same holds true for the curriculum as well as for the resources. Only classroom teachers can provide information and the experienced advice on what is needed in the classroom. The solutions to so many challenges rest in the wisdom and experience of our classroom teachers.

Next week, the Legislature will be in recess. I will once again ask the Premier and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to sit down with me. Together, let's figure out a way to give our classroom teachers a voice. Then we move forward. Let's not put in an ill-conceived program without a plan—a program that we have already done before with poor results. Let's do it right together.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: I have sat down three times with the Leader of the Opposition, and I am going to get him to meet with us again and to meet with our department. Anybody from the opposition can come to see what we are doing in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Our plans were made with extensive consultation. We met with literally thousands of people to get their input on where we are moving forward. I agree with, somewhere, putting a 10-year plan in place to have that stability but also to have the flexibility so that teachers can take the best of their abilities throughout the province and share those ideas. For seven years, the principals never met because they muzzled the principals in this province. We invited them back to the table, and they totally enjoyed getting together to share those experiences.

(Interjections.)



Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: I will work with anybody to make sure that we can have the improvements in place. I will work with the opposition, and that is what we are doing. We are showing true leadership on education. We will invest the most in education. We are listening to what is taking place, and, together, we will have the best education system, no doubt.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Higgs: We have had e-mails from principals, and here is a quote: “we were listened to, but not heard”. I am not denying any past performance of any government. I am saying: Let’s start a new day. Let’s listen to the classroom teachers in a meaningful way. Let’s open their voices and say: Say whatever you need. Do not worry about your jobs. We want this fixed.

Let’s decide what an educated student should look like and let the classroom teachers fix it. We have a golden opportunity to expand on your 10-year plan, to bridge the gap of the political process. Let’s not lose it. Defer an election promise that was ill-thought-out and ill-conceived, that is without a plan, and that is going to affect—how many?—90, 100, or 200 teachers, who are going to lose their jobs. Is that how we want to start a new program, to have that in place?

Minister, the opportunity is right now for us to build an education system that we will both be proud of. Will you please join me? Let’s make it happen.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Again, this is a classic example of fearmongering, fearmongering, fearmongering. Every time, the members opposite talk about doom and gloom. Let’s reverse it. Let’s ask the opposition to work with us.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We do have a golden opportunity. That is why we have consulted extensively throughout the province with leading experts and we have listened to teachers throughout the province. I get e-mails from teachers every day. I get e-mails from people from around the province with their concerns. We are listening to that, and that is why we are going to have the proper resources in place. It is going to take some time.

I believe that, by working together and not having the negative attitude here every day, which is reported in the papers and so on... That is the wrong approach. We thought that we were going to have a Leader of the Opposition with a different attitude, but it is back to the same old same old, just to try to get a headline. I want to work with the opposition. I invite you folks to work with us. I will have a meeting as soon as we can get together to talk with our department staff to see the wonderful things that the staff are doing.



Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

French Immersion

Mr. Jody Carr: The PC opposition has been working with the government. We have been working with the government on developing the 10-year plan. We applauded the government when it announced that it was going to develop a 10-year plan. We participated with the government. We appreciated that opportunity, and so did the people of New Brunswick. The disheartening point is that, as soon as that 10-year plan was released or not much longer after that, the minister and the Premier dabbled their hands in the education system again and interfered in something that the teachers have said that they do not want at this point in time.

The big question that parents are asking is this: Why is the government making this change? What is wrong with the current Grade 3? Is the problem with the current Grade 3 about access and enrollment? We know that the access and enrollment have gone up. We had 700 more students last year alone. Is it because of results? Is that what the problem is with Grade 3? Well, we do not know because the results are not in yet. Can the minister tell us? What is the problem with Grade 3?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We will say it again: We have let New Brunswickers... At least we are moving forward. We have the opposition saying that earlier is better. We worked with New Brunswickers to develop a plan. It was the former Minister of Education who actually commissioned the plan in 2013, with leading experts around the province stating that this is the way to go. We are looking at that. What we are finding here from the opposition is a divide-and-conquer attitude to find a wedge issue. We all know that we have improvements to make in our education system, and that is why we are working with our educators, with our public, and with our parents.

We will be moving forward with an extensive plan to improve our education system on all fronts. I do believe that, by working together... I will repeat it again because it is the most important thing. We have to have a positive attitude in the communities. When we have doom and gloom coming from the opposition every day, it does not help the attitudes around the province about our education system.

Mr. Jody Carr: In 2008, the Liberals said that the old Grade 1 program was not working. Then they changed it. The Liberals said that it was broken and it needed to be fixed. The Liberals made those changes, and the reasons that they made those changes were the lack of recruitment of bilingual teachers and the lack of support for struggling students. Now, they have come back and said: We will reverse that back to Grade 1.



At the same time, there is a growing list of those opposed to this change right now, including the west, south, and east school districts. Three of the four school districts have spoken publicly about this. We know that this change will require 200 English teachers to be put out of work. At the same time, the government cannot recruit the bilingual ones. According to the 2012 report, the recruitment of bilingual teachers was a problem then and is a problem now. What will the minister do specifically to make this plan work and to recruit the necessary teachers?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We are working with our Department of Education, we are working with our districts, and we are working with our teachers to take a look at where it is going to go in the upcoming year. We will have the resources put in place in time to make sure that we have implementation of the plan for Grade 1 French immersion.

Again, it was the former minister opposite who commissioned a report by experts around the province. What those members are saying here in the House every day is contradictory to what they were doing a few years ago. What has changed? It is very frustrating on this side of the House. We have the Leader of the Opposition saying: Work with us. We are saying the opposite: We will work with you folks if you work with us.

However, what we see here today is a doom-and-gloom type of opposition that is trying to fearmonger in New Brunswick. We want to put the positive out there that we have a good education system and that we have great educators in this province. We are going to work with them to make sure that we have the best education system in New Brunswick moving forward.

Mr. Jody Carr: I can tell the minister what has changed. What has changed is that the previous government listened to teachers and this government is not listening to the teachers. Despite politics, the teachers told the previous government: Do not change the entry point at this time. They also told this government the same thing, yet this government ignores it. It ignores this input from the consultation plan and from the 10-year plan. The government ignores this recommendation from the cochair. It is ignoring this recommendation from three out of the four Anglophone school districts.

At the same time, this 2012 report has eight recommendations yet this government has failed to tell this Legislature, the teachers, and the parents how it will make this transition work because it failed to provide the information. How can the government expect parents to trust it when it continues to ignore the input? The support was not there before. How will we guarantee that the support will be there now? How can they trust you?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We talk about trust here. How can we trust the former minister who, with the Leader of the Opposition, cut education in every year of the four years that they were in government? They did not have a plan.



Right now, what you are doing is cherry-picking. You are trying to find a wedge issue here. You cut. You decreased by \$1 million. When you came to power, you had a 1% cut in the first year and a 2% cut in the next year. It is very, very interesting that these members have been trying to find an issue on which they could grandstand for the past couple of weeks in the Legislature.

We are working with New Brunswickers. We are working with the educators. We will have a plan for the next 10 years that will have stability and will give teachers the resources to do the best job to improve our results and to make sure that we have the best students in New Brunswick, in every corner of the province. I truly believe that, by working together and not fearmongering, we will have a lot better results.

Enbridge Gas New Brunswick

Mr. Stewart: I could not help but notice all the blood drain from the Premier's face yesterday when I started asking questions about Enbridge lawyer and unofficial member of the public service Len Hoyt. I saw the Premier give the Energy Minister a look that said: You get up. My knees have gone weak.

Of course, Len Hoyt has a government e-mail address as a member of the Executive Council Office, so there is no denying that fact. Of course, in a CBC story from January 2014, Mr. Hoyt is identified as a company lawyer arguing against Enbridge living up to the 20%-below-electricity-cost agreement. I am very concerned that the Premier is forcing New Brunswickers to pay Enbridge \$150 million because his Liberal advisor and Enbridge lawyer told him to. Is the Premier able to stand to address this?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I am standing up, and my legs are not going shaky or weak this morning.

I find the questions from the members opposite interesting. Talk about doing things differently. Talk about doing things completely differently—ripping up contracts. In his member's statement this morning, the member for New Maryland-Sunbury mentioned changing the rules. The members opposite changed the rules, and that is why we were in the mess that we were in. That is why there is no longer a lawsuit of \$820 million, which would have had a tremendous amount of impact on our economy. It would have had a tremendous impact on education spending, health spending, infrastructure spending, and things like that.

However, the interesting part is Day 13. It has been 13 days since the deal was announced and the memorandum of understanding was announced. We are just starting to talk about it now. I am still not getting questions on it, which is something I do not quite understand.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Stewart: What we and the citizens of New Brunswick are not getting is an answer to the question. The Gallant government members are defending the \$150-million gift to the client of their lawyer pal by saying it headed off a big lawsuit brought against the government by their



lawyer pal and Enbridge, of which Len Hoyt now appears to be a part. The appearance of this is just horrible. Launch a big lawsuit against the government, and get your own way over the taxpayers of the province.

If this is all it takes, perhaps Corridor Resources could hire Len Hoyt to launch a lawsuit for it so that we can get moving on natural gas. Could the Premier confirm whether all lawsuits must be at least \$820 million, or will he fold for less? Will he speak up to address this perceived conflict of interest against the taxpayers of New Brunswick?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I do not know where to begin. The fact of the matter is that \$820 million, an erroneous amount of money, was going to be on the shoulders of the taxpayers if we did not settle down, settle, and have some discussions and dialogue with Enbridge on this file. Dialogue is important. I do not know whether any of those members over there have been in business before. However, if you have ever been involved in litigation, the first thing that comes up when you get to discovery is that they ask whether the parties have sat down to talk about this. That is before you sit in front of a judge. I think that is really important.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Oromocto-Lincoln will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: We have been willing to work together. It was a tremendous amount of erroneous... I am really proud of the fact that our government sat down to talk about this and tried to get to the bottom of this. It was a mess. It was a mess that was going to cost every single taxpayer in this province a lot of money, whether or not they burn gas. Whether or not you burn gas, you were going to be responsible for this. I think it is important...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Stewart: The first thing that you do is declare your conflict.

It is a scientific fact that natural gas is almost completely odourless. There has to be something added to natural gas to make it stink. In New Brunswick, we like to add the Gallant government and Len Hoyt. Then it really stinks. The government is giving Len Hoyt's client Enbridge a 50-year monopoly and removing pricing protection for gas customers. The hardworking people of New Brunswick will be hosed again. After 2020, gas rates can skyrocket.

Why would the Premier do something like this, all behind closed doors and in a secret deal, after promising a new approach and promising to be open and transparent? Why was this



secret deal cooked up for Len Hoyt's customer Enbridge? Will the minister get on his feet and tell us whether, in fact, Len Hoyt wrote this deal? Is this a conflict of interest?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I am getting a lot of zest from the other side. They are definitely starting things off right. They are doing things differently, completely doing things differently. I guess that this must be their tactic.

The fact of the matter is that we just went through a Strategic Program Review where we were trying to find \$600 million in savings. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the world we would be living in if we lost this lawsuit and \$820 million was booked directly on the files, directly on the books of the province? Not many people in the province knew about this. They did not know about this lawsuit, but, if this came down and we had to pay out, everyone would know about it.

The fact of the matter is that we have had to clean up. We have had to clean up the Point Lepreau issue, the \$1-billion cost overrun. We have had to clean up the Coleson Cove issue, and that has been an ongoing thing for many years. Also, there is the \$150 million for Harbour Bridge. We can talk about that.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Food Banks

Mr. Coon: In 2009, New Brunswick adopted a poverty reduction strategy, with the explicit mandate to reduce poverty in New Brunswick. Since that time, deep poverty has increased by 5%, and food bank usage... According to recent statistics—the latest evidence of this since the poverty reduction strategy was launched—New Brunswick's food banks have seen a 26% increase in the number of clients. That is an extra 4 000 people each month. Will the Minister of Families and Children explain his plan to help families living in deep poverty?

Hon. Mr. Doherty: Thank you very much for the question. Rather than referring to them as food banks, we like to refer to them now as food centres in which we educate those who, unfortunately, have to use food banks about good nutrition, providing counseling in terms of being able to cook and in terms of being able to develop community gardens in which they can produce their own food. We are making changes in terms of educating the public about the importance of food, especially for those who, unfortunately, have to use these food centres.

I am very, very proud of the new direction in which we are going as a government. It is a direction in which we are educating those who have to use it about the importance of good nutrition, the importance of being self-sufficient, and the importance of developing pride.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Mr. Coon: The fact remains that food bank usage has gone up by 26% since the poverty reduction strategy was launched and deep poverty has increased. Shawn Pegg, Director of Policy and Research for Food Banks Canada, was in the media this week discussing the annual survey and the results. According to him, people fall back on food banks for all kinds of reasons, including job loss, low wages, and sickness. In times of need, our social assistance programs are failing New Brunswickers, sending them to food banks across the province—whatever you call them.

Will the minister increase social assistance rates in the next budget so that those most in need have the resources that they need to secure healthy meals? That is the solution.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: It is a great opportunity to get up and talk about this issue with regard to food centres. Our government is going to focus on jobs and education because that is the foundation that is going to be helping and making sure that families are resilient. We understand that, if people can get jobs and better education, they will not have to rely so much on the food centres.

We continue to talk with food centres around the province, and we will continue to help them. We continue to pack groceries with the food centres. It is about education. It is about education about healthy foods rather than foods that are not so healthy for the people of New Brunswick. We will continue.

I want the member opposite to know that New Brunswick is the only province in Canada that contributes to food centres. I wonder whether he knows that. I will ask the member to understand that we are helping people in this province and we will continue to do so because we want to move this province forward and make it the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Mr. Coon: The minister does not seem to understand that poverty is increasing in this province, not improving. It is getting worse. There was a 4% increase in deep poverty, and the use of food banks is going through the roof. More families are having to depend on food banks because they do not have the money to feed their families.

The short-term solution for that is to increase welfare rates. The longer-term solution would be to adopt a basic income. The federal government is planning on adopting a national poverty reduction strategy with a basic income guarantee pilot study in a number of Canadian communities. Will the minister agree to open negotiations with his federal counterpart to establish a basic income pilot in our province?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I appreciate standing up here today. I find it ironic that members of the opposition are clapping for what the member for Fredericton South is saying.

(Interjections.)



Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: The members opposite are against the minimum wage, and they made cuts to everything.

Again, we are working with these people. We are working with all New Brunswickers. Again, New Brunswick is the only province that is contributing to food centres.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for New Maryland-Sunbury will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: We understand that jobs and education are key and are the foundation to helping people. We want to continue that. The member opposite knows that we are working hard. We are working hard with the federal government and the provincial government. Now, for the first time in a long time, all three levels of government, including municipalities, are working closer together to handle these issues. We are very proud of what we are doing, and we will continue to work hard for the people of New Brunswick.

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

