

December 8, 2016

[Original]

### French Immersion

**Mr. Higgs:** Let's do a quick comparison of the participation rate: 31% of students took Grade 1 early French immersion in the last year that it was offered, back in September 2007. This compares with 42% of Grade 3 students who opted to take early French immersion at the Grade 3 entry point in September 2015. That was a substantial increase in participation, and it was highlighted in the letter that the Minister of Education received from the New Brunswick Society of Retired Teachers.

To what does the Minister of Education attribute the substantial difference in participation? Does he feel that a lower participation rate is an acceptable consequence of the proposed change back to the Grade 1 entry point?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** Here we go again. It is four weeks that we have been here in the Legislature, and the member is fixated on finding a divisive issue in the Legislature. The Leader of the Opposition said that he would work with us in government, and, now, he is fixated on this one issue.

We have to remind New Brunswickers that, when the opposition was in government, it cut and slashed in education and muzzled the civil service. What has changed here today? We have the Leader of the Opposition trying to find a wedge issue, to be divisive. The difference here is that we are going to invest the most in education in the right areas—priority areas—to make sure that we have the best education moving forward, from this day forward.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** We have a 10-year education plan. We have consulted. We have done many more things than what the opposition would have ever done when it was in power.

**Mr. Higgs:** I will take that as, if the enrollment drops, that is not an issue. That is what we learned from the last time, but we are going to do it again.

Is it not unfortunate that we consider education for our students a divisive issue? Is it not unfortunate that we on this side of the House want better results? Apparently, that is not an issue on the other side of the House.



I would like to think that the goal of French immersion is to give all children the opportunity to learn French and to graduate at or near a proficiency level that would let them have an equal opportunity for employment quality in our province—employment that requires an established level of proficiency. It seems to me that about 30% more students taking early French immersion with a later Grade 3 entry point is a good thing. I am sure that we could all agree on one thing: Immersion programs work best when people actually take them. Will the minister commit to this House today that those gains in participation will remain after this change? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** We have an opposition where all it wants to do is press pause. All it wants to do is find divisive issues. All it wants to do is say that the system is broken. It is always negative. On this side of the House, we are talking about positive things, moving forward and getting things done.

For four weeks, we have listened every day to this member of the opposition talk about a divisive way of trying to do government. We are talking positive. We are consulting. We are working with our stakeholders. We are working with our parents. I met parents last night who said that this is the right thing. Even the member opposite, the critic for Education, said that earlier is better. We are listening too.

What is also interesting today is that the opposition commissioned a report in 2012 and neglected to even look at it. We have taken that report that was done by two former Education Ministers—a Liberal and a Conservative... They came out with a report that said that this is the right thing to do. Yes, it is an issue, where we have...

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

**Mr. Higgs:** I guess results do not matter. How many kids take it does not matter. It does not matter that 80% of our kids are graduating without being proficient in both languages, after 40 or 50 years. When you have a system that is broken, at some point, you look at the facts and say: We can do better. I believe that we can do better.

Access to French immersion in our rural schools has been a contentious issue for years. My colleague from Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin has been a champion for this cause. My question for the minister is especially important for rural communities. Because we have hundreds more children taking early French immersion at the Grade 3 entry point, many small schools now have the numbers to support early French immersion. Can the minister guarantee today that he will protect these schools if enrollment falls? Will he guarantee that no school will lose its early French immersion program due to a low enrollment in the Grade 1 program? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** What is broken here today is this broken record that we hear across there. It is so frustrating for us as a government trying to move forward with a 10-year education plan for New Brunswickers. We know that there are issues in the education system, and we are fixing it.



It is going to take some time. We are working with everybody to move forward. When the members opposite were in government, they cut education. They muzzled the civil service. They had the teachers scared. What has changed here? We have a new Leader of the Opposition, but it is the same old gang that was there four years ago, that did nothing in education. You did zero.

Right now, we are cleaning up the mess. I am getting so frustrated with listening, for four weeks, to the same repetitive broken record here. We are working with our educators. We are working with our systems. We are working with our principals. In fact, the previous government muzzled the principals. For seven years, it would not allow the principals to meet. We actually got the principals back together, and they really enjoyed having that collaboration.

**Mr. Higgs:** The crux of the problem is that you talk about a 10-year plan—the minister talks about it, the Premier has talked about it.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** What an omission. This change in the entry to early immersion is not part of the 10-year plan. The vision of this government is not part of its plan. The cochair says: Do not do it. But no, that does not matter because we have a political decision on the table.

I say this again: Immersion works only if people take it. We want more people taking it, and the government is killing the model that attracts more students. This is urgent because, in some of the school closure studies done in small rural schools, the DEC's cited lack of immersion as a reason to close a school. If a school loses its early immersion program because the government went back to a less inclusive model, that is unfair to small communities. Will the minister commit today that he will instruct DEC's not to use the loss of the early immersion program as a reason to close a school under Policy 409?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** We will work with all the DEC's. We will work with the principals. We will work with the teachers. We will work with... What we have is divisive, divisive, divisive every day for four weeks in this Legislature. We are working with our educators. Yes, there are going to be some challenges moving forward. We all understand that, but we are doing the right thing. We feel that, with the report and with the consultation that we did, earlier is better. There will be different issues that we will have to face moving forward over the next couple of years, but we are working with our educators, we are meeting with the DEC's, and we are meeting with the principals.

I think that we have a government on this side that has a plan for moving forward. The opposition members had no plan and still do not have a plan. They are all over the map. We are putting more resources in the right places in education so that we will have a better system moving forward, and we are being positive here. All we are hearing from the other side is



negativity. It is so frustrating to listen to the negative rhetoric every day from this opposition. We want to be positive, and we want to work with New Brunswickers to have the best education system.

**Mr. Higgs:** Do you know what is exciting about our position on this? We have heard from 2 700 retired teachers. We have heard from classroom teachers who do not dare speak. We have heard from the DEC chairs who say: Do not do this. We have heard from people who were there and talking after they heard the announcement, after the consultation process was supposed to happen. What happened first? The announcement. Then we will talk. That is not a way to get results.

We believe there is an opportunity here. There is an opportunity to work together on a 10-year education plan. It was a foundation of this government, which was saying: We want stability in the classroom. We agree with that. You cannot get it by saying: We want stability, but, by the way, we are going to introduce a new program.

The opportunity to improve a broken system is right now, and I want to be part of that. I want to create a stable system going forward. I ask again: Will the Minister of Education put a pause on this early immersion program that has not seen good results? Let's build a program that is the best for all students. Let's work together to achieve that. Will they do that?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** Again, we hear pause, pause, pause. They want to pause everything. We are getting things done here. We are moving forward.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** It is just frustrating. The Minister of Education is working with the DEC Chairs, working with the districts, working with the principals, and working with the teachers. In fact, in my first week on the job, the Premier and I met with teachers from around the province for a full day. It was the first time in history that the Premier met with educators. We put it out on the floor with them, and we had a really good dialogue. We took back lots of information to be able to move this forward.

Yes, there will be some growing pains. There is no doubt about that, but we are doing the right thing. We feel that earlier is better, and it is no secret to New Brunswickers. It was right there in red and white—our commitment to move forward on French immersion. We are doing the right thing, we are working with New Brunswickers, and we are going to have the best education moving forward, which you folks never did.

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



**Mr. Higgs:** It is truly disappointing to talk about this and to hear the government give accolades to itself and say: We went around for the first time ever, and we talked to teachers. It is one thing to talk to teachers, and it is another to listen to teachers. That is the difference. That is what we are doing—listening to teachers. What we have found is that, yes, they have been told: Do not speak. Negotiations are under way, so do not talk. We cannot say anything. Well, I am hoping that those teachers will stand up and be counted, and I am proud of the retired teachers who are standing up and being counted.

We are at a time right now unlike any other time in history. We can say: We are putting the guns down. We are building an education system that will stand the test of time. The Premier has repeatedly said that education is the number one issue. What is the solution? Put in a politically based decision and throw more money at it, and we will all get better. We are not getting better. We have thrown money at it for years. We have a 40% increase and a 20% decrease in student population, and our system is ninth in the country. We can do better. Let's work together. Will the Minister of Education do that?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** Again, we hear the member opposite saying that this is a political decision. This is something on which we have consulted New Brunswickers. In fact, your own report that you commissioned in 2012 by former Liberal and Conservative Education Ministers put it in black and white, and this is what we are doing.

What has changed is that we have an opposition that is trying to divide and conquer here today. The members opposite are trying to find a divisive issue here. They want to say that the system is broken. Anything we hear from that side of the House is negative. What we are doing is putting in positive measures. We are going to put the proper resources in the proper places. We are going to do the most that any government has ever done, putting money and resources where they need to be in our education system. We have consulted. We have a 10-year plan moving forward, with stability. I do believe that working with people rather than being divisive and negative will prove to bring much better results.

**Mr. Higgs:** Some 90 to 100 teachers are going to lose their jobs, at a minimum. We do not know the number.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** We have a situation where a plan does not exist.

(Interjection.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The minister responsible for the Treasury Board will come to order.

Continue.



**Mr. Higgs:** A plan does not exist. It is clear that a plan does not exist.

I have one simple question. I have asked it over and over without an answer. The 10-year plan that has been touted heavily did not include a plan to change the French immersion entry date. How could that be possible, when the people putting it together were representing the best interests of our students and were representing the best interests of what the government was proposing? It did not include a political plan to change the French immersion date. How could that be at all possible, given the magnitude of effort put into the 10-year education plan?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** I did say one thing right. There was a magnitude of effort put into the education plan. It was the most consultation done in history, going around the province. I have to say that, when we delivered the plan and made the announcements, yes, there were people who had concerns about it, but we are putting the resources in the right places. We are going to make sure that we have the most money invested in education.

The difference here is that the former government members wanted to cut. They cut, they cut, they cut, and they cut. They wanted to try to balance the budget on the backs of education. Well, the member opposite could not balance the budget. He never did, so he is here right now. What has changed? I do not know what has changed. When the members opposite were in government for four years, they did nothing but cut in education. They did nothing but muzzle the civil service. They had everybody scared out of their wits.

What we are doing is working with our educators. We are going to put the proper resources in the proper place to make sure that we have the best education system moving forward, and the results will come.

[*Translation*]

## Pharmacies

**Ms. Dubé:** There certainly is confusion in the health sector with regard to the pharmacists who work in all our communities. The Minister of Health announced with great fanfare that we are now going to have an integrated electronic information system for drugs in the province. However, we are learning this is not necessarily the case.

Pharmacists will once again have to use two systems, which will create more confusion, and this goes against the minister's announcement. In his announcement, the minister talked about an integrated system for drugs; is this actually the reality?

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** Since the member used to be Minister of Health, she should know that the project we completed last week has been in development for some years. The work started under the government that preceded the government that came before us. The work on this project continued during the four years when the current official opposition was in government. Now, we have finally completed this work.



This is basic work that had to be done to connect all pharmacies to the Department of Health. If we want to eventually have an electronic record for every New Brunswicker, this connexion first had to be created. Finally, today, all pharmacies in the province are connected to the same system, which is very positive.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Dubé:** This is a positive step, but it is the opposite of what the minister announced. In this announcement, the minister seems to want to convince people of certain things.

What pharmacists have been requesting for a long time is an integrated system. Our pharmacists who serve the public will need twice the time normally needed to do this work, since they will now have access to the Drug Information System. With this system, drugs presenting a higher risk of abuse and so on can be monitored. Also, pharmacists will subsequently have to go back into their system to see whether there are any contraindications and to manage services required by the prescribing physician.

So, once again, what was announced was a fully integrated system, and all pharmacists would be part of it. There would have been a single system through which they would have access to the information needed to serve the public. Is the minister telling us he has finished his work on this? This is certainly not what pharmacists were requesting.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** The member clearly has not read the published material and has not seen what was in the papers, because we were clear about this being a first step. The work is not finished; there is still work to be done.

We did in fact form a working committee with the New Brunswick Pharmacists' Association and other partners, because there is still work to be done. However, before being able to improve the various monitoring programs and everything else, pharmacies first had to be connected. All pharmacies had to be connected to a provincial network to be able to access information. This is what we announced; we did not say the work was finished. The program is not entirely completed, but this is a first and important step that took several years to finalize.



[Original]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Minister.

[Translation]

**Ms. Dubé:** What you announced was more a drug monitoring program, which is completely different from an integrated electronic information system. These are two different things. In your press release, you did not talk about a first step, either. You misled the public, then.

I am certainly asking the minister to set the record straight. If, as he is saying, there is still work to be done, can the minister shed some light on this for us this morning and tell us when pharmacists will finally have their integrated system to better serve the public? Can the minister at least clarify this for us and maybe give us a date?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** Once again, as my colleague the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development was saying earlier, they focus only on the negative. They focus only on the negative.

This is a project that has been years in the making. I can tell you that there are staff members at the Department of Health that have worked diligently for years to see this day come true, where all pharmacies across the province are finally connected into the Department of Health. This is an amazing accomplishment that staff have worked on for years, and they should be congratulated because this was hard work—you had all these different pharmacies all using different vendors, different brands—to bring all of this into one.

This is a very positive first step. There is more work to do. We are going to continue to work with the Pharmacists' Association, as we have been doing, and we are going to continue to improve on that system.

## Enbridge Gas New Brunswick

**Mr. Stewart:** The 50-year monopoly that this government is attempting to give to Enbridge is clearly not in the best interest of our province. The minister and I established in committee that it is a lot like Clark Griswold's Jelly of the Month Club. It is the gift that keeps on giving—giving to Enbridge and its lawyers and probably to Liberals too—and taking from all New Brunswickers for half a century.

Can the minister advise the House as to what happens when, in 2018 and 2019, the price of gas increases? This deal is fixing distribution rates at 3% increases. Under market-based rates, if the price of gas increased, distribution rates would fall. Does this bill mean that users of natural gas are open to large bill increases if gas prices increase?





**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** It is 35 days since the bill was announced. I kind of stroked it off on my little piece of paper. The fact of the matter is that this deal was announced on November 4, and we are just getting around to asking questions about some substantive issues to do with the bill.

In fact, the other night, in committee, to sum it all up, the members opposite were concerned about the press release and changing the press release to “better deal for the consumers”. They were talking about the lawyers involved, the conflict of interest, what statutes you listened to, what legal advice you had, and ministers’ briefings—all of which had nothing to do with Bill 6.

The fact of the matter is that, going forward—and I have explained this out to the member opposite—the Energy and Utilities Board will make the determination. Maybe I will say that again a little slower: The Energy and Utilities Board will make the determination, based on the revenue requirements...

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

**Mr. Stewart:** I, too, will speak slowly. It has been 35 days, and you still have not answered a single question.

This sweetheart deal for Enbridge brings a lot of uncertainty for New Brunswick’s 12 000 gas customers. The government is evidently following the advice of Enbridge and its lawyer in giving away the farm. As we are aware, Enbridge is currently seeking a 30% increase for 2017. This fact seems to get clouded among the other negative aspects of this Gallant government, Len Hoyt-esque Enbridge deal. Can the minister advise this House whether there will be an adjustment in 2018 and 2019 if the current 30% increase that Enbridge applied for in 2017 is accepted by the EUB?

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** To sum up... Maybe I will speak slowly. Maybe I should speak slower in committee. The members opposite were so caught up on so many things, so many other things to do with the substantial part of the bill, to talk about Bill 6... They were talking about other things. Imagine this. I think that we spent 25 minutes the other night, because they were upset that the whole deal was not published on the Web site... It was tabled in the House.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Portland-Simonds will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** There could not be any place that is more public to put it. Unfortunately, it was not on the Web site, but we had a conversation with our staff in trying to figure out: Well, can this be done? Well, for 20 or 25 minutes, they were upset about the fact that it was not on the Web site.



The member keeps mentioning that the sky is falling. I think that is what has been happening over there this morning. The sky is falling on everything. Besides the point... I know that they do not want to talk about it, but removal of the financial risk of a lawsuit...

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

**Mr. Stewart:** Financial risk—what a joke.

Enbridge claimed that it would make an investment of \$300 million and attract 70 000 customers. History shows that its investment turned out to be \$500 million and it attracted only 12 000 customers. We are aware that the current Enbridge deal was due to expire in 2019.

I would like to ask the minister again—and I am hopeful that he might be so kind as to answer questions for the first time in 35 days: Did you discuss the possible takeover of the system in 2019 by NB Power? Has this concept been discussed inside your office or the Premier's Office?

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** I can tell you something. I can assure you of one thing. An \$820-million lawsuit is no joke—not on this side of the House. Every man, woman, and child in this province would be on the hook for \$1 100.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** We made that very clear. This deal was done without any taxpayer money changing hands.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Riverview will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** Now, if we want to talk about other parts of it, it is going to help stabilize rates for all sectors, including the commercial and industrial sectors—a question that they have never asked. It will provide some certainty against large increases to the customer class through the Energy and Utilities Board oversight. It establishes rate caps of 3% for residential and 0% for commercial classes for 2018-19. It subjects any future rate increases to approval by the Energy and Utilities Board, providing rate hike protection in the same way that NB Power customers are protected from rate increases.

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



## Jobs

**Mr. K. MacDonald:** On Friday, we learned that another 5 000 New Brunswick workers fell off the Statistics Canada charts. They have either moved on or no longer qualify for benefits. In our province, we have 40 000 people who need jobs, but there are no jobs for them. We have an agency that is supposed to be working on this critical problem, but it has turned out to be a bust.

That brings me to my first question. On Friday, with no fanfare or photo op, no bells, whistles, or fireworks, the Gallant government snuck out the first report from Opportunities New Brunswick. It is a glossy, full-of-colour, expensive-looking document that is chock full of rhetoric and pictures. Can the minister advise the House how many people are actually working—actually working—and on the job today as a result of the money spent on this document?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Ms. Landry:** I am very pleased to rise in the House to speak about the annual report tabled by Opportunities New Brunswick on December 1.

The fiscal year that ended on March 31, 2016, was a great success for Opportunities New Brunswick, and we exceeded our job creation and economic development targets. Our target was to create 1 500 jobs, but, through programs and with the help of Opportunities New Brunswick employees, we created 2 965 jobs.

I am very proud of these results, since, not only have jobs been created, but \$288 million in revenue has also been generated for the province and New Brunswickers.

*[Original]*

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

**Mr. K. MacDonald:** Who said the minister could not stand up to answer a question? However, I would tell her that there is a big difference between costly, splashy media events or announced possible future jobs and hardworking New Brunswickers on the job earning a paycheque. From what I can understand, this costly, shiny document from Opportunities New Brunswick is little more than a collection of pictures taken at these costly, splashy media events. The number of jobs claimed in this document, no matter how large or small, means very little if there are no people working on these jobs, taking home a paycheque. The 40 000 people who need a job will take little comfort from the minister's rhetoric. They need to go to work, and they need to go to work now.

Does the minister happen to know how much was spent on this shiny, glossy, rhetoric-laden document from Opportunities New Brunswick?



[Translation]

**Hon. Ms. Landry:** I am once again very pleased to rise and talk about this document, which demonstrates the extraordinary work done by the Opportunities New Brunswick team.

If you take the trouble to read this document, you will see that one of the priorities of Opportunities New Brunswick was business growth. We provided funding and assistance for the 225 applications that were approved. In terms of export development, we hosted 105 export activities, in which 1 186 people took part. As for attracting investment, there were 65 outbound missions and 7 incoming missions. We have done a great deal of work, and, in 2016, we are maintaining this momentum with significant progress.

[Original]

**Mr. K. MacDonald:** An ovation for that is just downright silly.

I took the time to read the document, and it talks about future jobs, not actual jobs that are employing New Brunswickers today. The ministers, both old and new, will recall my fruitless efforts to gain any information on targets, goals, or measurements from them or from the head of Opportunities New Brunswick despite dozens and dozens of questions.

Now, in this report that was shamefully stuck out on a Friday, there is a claim that this outfit had a target of 1 500 jobs. Out of nowhere, a target has emerged—a target that was miles away from the Premier's promise of 5 000 more jobs in Year 1 and 10 000 more jobs by the time his government gets tossed out of office. Can the minister advise this House as to when and how this target of 1 500 was established? The minister surely did not seem to be in the loop anytime I asked the question in the past.

[Translation]

**Hon. Ms. Landry:** As you know, Opportunities New Brunswick was created in April 2015. It resulted from the amalgamation of Invest New Brunswick and the Department of Economic Development. The transition team's target was to create 1 500 new jobs, and you also know that Opportunities New Brunswick is not the only organization supporting job creation in New Brunswick.

I can tell you that the annual report shows that there is a direct link between the 2 965 jobs that were created and Opportunities New Brunswick and its employees; so, this is nearly twice the targeted number. I think we have created over 9 000 jobs so far, which clearly meets the targets this government set for itself, and we are maintaining this great momentum since New Brunswick businesses are creating jobs all over the province.



[Original]

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

