

December 14, 2016

[Original]

French Immersion

Mr. Higgs: Yes, I am back on education again today, and do you know why? It is because I have had over... There have been over 3 000 people who have responded in relation to supporting our move here to have a change made to this early entry point, because we are not ready for it. Why am I sticking on it? It is because 2 700 retired teachers want us to stick on it. Why are we sticking on it? It is because educators in the classroom want us to stick on it. Even though the Premier will not allow them to speak openly, they will speak privately, and we are listening.

Another concern was raised. I have asked these questions previously, and why do I ask them again? It is because I am not getting any answers. The question was in relation to the change in regulation pertaining to the licenses for our provinces. I want to understand whether there has been a regulatory change that would change the license requirement in our province. Will the Premier or the Minister of Education admit today that this government has changed the regulation pertaining to teachers' licenses?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have already answered that question. I apologize to the member opposite if he does not like the answer. It is what the case is, and it is what the situation is.

For probably the 12th time now, I think that it is important for us to underline this again for the Leader of the Opposition to recognize that we made a decision based on a report that was done in 2012, a report that was sanctioned by his government and that was commissioned by his government when he was the Minister of Finance. This report was done by two previous Education Ministers, one of a Liberal government and one of a conservative government. They listened to hundreds of New Brunswickers. They met with stakeholders, experts, students, and teachers, and they came to the conclusion, based on the parameters which the member opposite's government gave them, that restoring French immersion to Grade 1 was the right move for the province. We made a promise in 2014 that we would do exactly that. Here, we find ourselves today, fulfilling our promise.

Mr. Higgs: There we go again. The question was about the licensing. The November 16 edition of the *Royal Gazette*, beginning on page 1 409, New Brunswick Regulation 2016-62, under the *Education Act*, filed on October 31, 2016—31 days after the Premier announced the return to Grade 1 early immersion—says:

1 Section 2 of New Brunswick Regulation 2004-8 under the Education Act is amended by repealing the definition “teacher’s licence”.



Thirty-one days after the early immersion announcement, there was a change to the definition of “teacher’s licence”. The timing is suspect. The question is clear: Has this regulatory change been made as a result of the early-entry plan in French immersion? Because we cannot find qualified teachers here in New Brunswick, we need to source teachers anywhere or we need to change the regulation in order to put teachers in the classrooms? Can the Premier admit that the timing of this change is directly related to the early immersion plan?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is not. This initiative has not been undertaken as a recruitment tool. This initiative is one that has been undertaken for us, as a province, to comply with the Agreement on Internal Trade. If the Leader of the Opposition would stop his fixation on French immersion, pick up a newspaper, read the news, or listen to a newscast, he would see that there are some pretty intense conversations happening all across this country to make sure that we have an Agreement on Internal Trade from coast to coast to coast in Canada. The timing is because of that. If the member opposite would make sure that he looks at other things that would help our economic growth in the province, such as internal trade, he would know that this is the timing that has made us put this forward at this time.

Again, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to stop fearmongering. We all get it. He is against French immersion. We get it. I think that New Brunswickers have gotten that after the 12th time that he has asked questions on this.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: However, we are for it, and we are putting it forward.

Mr. Higgs: There is the fearmongering. The Premier obviously thinks that I will be silenced by throwing out those innuendos or that I am going to accept an education system that is in crisis, an education system where, if you look across the Anglophone system, is achieving fewer than 4% of graduates who meet the standards of being bilingual in a province that has been bilingual for over 40 years. I am not prepared to accept that. I want a province where we all speak both languages, and our education system has to make that happen.

Our educators say that our system is in crisis, despite the dedication and efforts of the professionals in the system. They describe a closed system, with low expectations and defined standards, reeling after constant change on all fronts. The French immersion program is not preparing New Brunswick students for the complex contemporary world. The system as a whole is not coherent, and there is no systematic culture of support for learning. Teachers cannot say what end-of-year expectations are. Can the Premier or his minister provide a clear, comprehensive...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.



Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition tries to give the impression that he is not fearmongering. Literally, the next sentence has to do with calling our education system a crisis, broken—talking and spitting out all the challenges that he can possibly think of that our education system faces. We have challenges, sure, but there are some great things happening in our education system. There are some great things happening in our province.

Fearmongering is not going to help solve the challenges. What we need to do is to have a fact-based discussion, and the facts are these. A report was done in 2012, commissioned by the leader's government. He was the Minister of Finance. He was around the Cabinet table, saying: Yeah, let's do it. That was because they made a promise in 2010 that they would restore French immersion to Grade 1. The commission report came out recommending that we restore French immersion to Grade 1. We promised that we would do it, and I am very pleased to announce to New Brunswickers that we are getting it done.

Mr. Higgs: Without the plan, without the facts that support it, with massive opposition from educators who know the system, the Premier will forge ahead. Now, that is fact-based decision-making, without even including it in a 10-year plan. How difficult is it to understand this when it is not even part of the government's own 10-year plan?

The consistent lack of performance of the New Brunswick education system on national and international assessments demonstrates that the system is underperforming generally. The data from New Brunswick provincial assessments confirms that, even on the assessments developed and administered in New Brunswick and based on New Brunswick curriculum, results are poor.

Is the Premier willing to allow schools sufficient autonomy so that they can design class composition and curriculum delivery in such a way that all students can have the best chance of achieving our curriculum goals? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I have said several times in the House and across the province, we are working with teachers, community leaders, and all the other people who want to commit to giving our children the best education system possible.

In fact, we based the development of our 10-year education plans on this principle. We followed this principle, and it helped us establish our 10-year education plans, which are very solid and will help us get the results we want for our children and for our province.

I think it goes without saying that we are facing challenges, but there are also some good things happening. So, it is good to think about what must be done to overcome challenges, and we think the solution is to invest more in education.



The Leader of the Opposition thinks our education system has enough money. In fact, when he was Minister of Finance, he made cuts, and we are doing the opposite: We are making historic investments in education.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: This government obviously believes in throwing money, taxing people more, and hoping for the best. There is no plan. It is clear that there is no plan.

The contributors to the failure of the education system include constant change in government models, constant change in curricula, policy initiatives driven by theory rather than practice, mismanagement of the French immersion program, and the fact that there are no stated and widely understood educational standards. Can the Premier or his minister supply any document, either in print or electronically, that provides a clear summary of educational standards for students in New Brunswick? Further, can the Premier or his minister provide, either in print or electronically, any document that describes how curriculum goals align with educational standards for students in New Brunswick? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is amazing to hear the Leader of the Opposition accuse us of having no plan. I think he has gone back in time and is actually criticizing his previous government, because it had no plan for education. Mr. Speaker, I think you know very well how much we pushed, when we were in opposition, for that government to have a plan for our students, to have a plan for our youth, and to have a plan for our teachers, but that government decided not to. Education was not a priority, and that was demonstrated in the fact that the government had no plan. It was also demonstrated in the fact that, when the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance, he cut education.

It is amazing to hear what the Leader of the Opposition is saying today, and I know his caucus members are cringing every time they hear it. For him to keep making the argument that there is enough money in education, for him to use a sentence stating that we are throwing money away when we invest in education, is baffling. It is okay because all of us on this side of the Legislature know how important education is and we will invest the most in education in the history of our province.

Mr. Higgs: When you ignore the facts, it is easier to expose the rhetoric. It is easier to say: Just throw money at it, and we will all be better. Well, history has shown that is not the case. Teachers will tell you that is not the case. Teachers will tell you: Leave us alone. Let us have stability. Let us take control of the classrooms, and we will get the results. But, no, we are going to invent new programs. We are going to put something back in place that was already there and that did not achieve the results that we wanted in this province. We are not even assessing the current standards to understand where we are in the Grade 3 immersion, but we are going to change it.



The job description of a teacher in New Brunswick is to maintain order, attendance records, and discipline. Was the Premier aware that New Brunswick's *Education Act*, in its description of the role of a teacher, makes no reference to teaching the curriculum as part of the teacher's job? Does the Premier agree that this is an oversight, at the very least, and would the Premier be open to an amendment that made teaching the curriculum a core principle of teaching? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Where to begin? First of all, the Leader of the Opposition again this morning is saying that the system is broken and in crisis. Then, a few questions later, he made the argument that we should let everything be and that they need stability. Well, that makes no sense at all unless you do not have education as a priority. Then maybe it does make sense because that is the case for the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition says that we are trying to ignore the facts. He is the one who will not admit that there was a report done in 2012. It was sanctioned by his government, with two independent former Education Ministers from both stripes of government, Conservative and Liberal. They came to the conclusion, after listening to New Brunswickers, that we should restore French immersion to Grade 1. He is saying that we are ignoring the facts. He is ignoring the report that his government sanctioned.

He is still saying that we are throwing away money when we invest in education. Well, we do not agree. He is saying that we are creating new programs and that we should stop. We do not agree. The Integrated Service Delivery program, which is helping our children overcome challenges in mental health, is a good program for our youth.

Mr. Higgs: I am pleased that the Premier continues to talk about reports. It is a report that does not have justification because the other program has not yet been evaluated and the timing is crucial.

The questions that I have asked this morning are direct quotes from a report from April 2002. It was in 2002—14 years ago. The same questions apply today. What are we doing to our educators? What are we doing to our students? We are going in circles. If the Premier wants to read a report, I would suggest that he look at this one. It is 14 years later, and it describes our situation. Is that not a sad state—here in this House, we allowed that to happen? We should all be ashamed of ourselves. We are doing it again because we are throwing a policy that is not well-founded and not planned into the classroom. We are going to put teachers out of work, and we are again not listening to the classroom teachers. Let's fix this.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Yet again, there was no question from the Leader of the Opposition, but that is fine. I love that he thinks that there is an aha moment when he tells us the date of this report and that it is in 2002. I love it because the aha moment is that he was the Finance Minister for four years, from 2010 to 2014.

(Interjections.)



Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The member opposite should ask himself what he did to improve the state of our education system. Well, he does not have to go very far. I can tell him. What he did is cut in education. He made cuts to one of the most important programs that we, as a government, can give to our people.

Education is by far the best economic investment that we can make, and it is by far the best social equalizer. When we invest more in education, we know that it is strategic. He thinks that it is throwing money away. We know that it is offering a better New Brunswick for all people. We know that it is making a real difference in the lives of our children and our youth, and we know that, if we are going to get our economy to where we all want it to be, education is by far the best investment that we can make. That is why we will invest more.

Mr. Higgs: I think that the Premier should look at his first year in office if he wants to talk about cuts in education. It is funny how he skipped over that. It is also quite interesting how he skipped over having no more discussion of reports. It is an aha moment. It is an aha moment that says we are not getting better. We have increased investment in education by over 40% over the past 10 years, roughly, and we have had a 20% decline in enrollment.

We are not basing our decisions on facts. We are not basing our decisions on getting better. We are basing our decisions on a political... It is because, oh, yes, we said that we would do this. We did not put in the report and we did not follow through because it was not time. It was not the right time, and the educators were telling us that. They are telling me that more and more now than ever.

Once again, I will ask the Premier this: Will he follow his own 10-year plan? The plan has been under development for some time, but now is the chance to make it work. I want to be part of that. We want to be part of that, bringing...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition is forgetting that his caucus already participated in the development of our 10-year plans. This is work we had initiated, and we had invited the other political parties, teachers, New Brunswickers, and community leaders to participate. We already undertook a process to develop solid 10-year education plans that will help us get the results we all want.

The big difference we see this morning is that we believe that more money must be invested in education. We believe we must invest in our young people and in the future, but the Leader of the Opposition does not. He believes there is enough money in education, and he believes that



when we invest in this sector, we are wasting our money. However, this is not the case, and we know it; this is why we will invest more than ever in education, here in New Brunswick.

[Original]

Mactaquac Provincial Park

Mr. Urquhart: The Mactaquac Provincial Park Golf Course was given to the people of New Brunswick under the 1966 basin agreement. We were assured that the government would look after it. Like Kings Landing and the islands, the park was to supply much-needed work for displaced workers and families. The rumours abound in the community. Can the minister or the government explain to us what plans they have for Mactaquac Park and what effect it will have in the province?

Hon. Mr. Ames: I thank the member opposite for the question. As my colleague from Carleton-York knows, all our parks are valued assets for our entire province and for all the people of New Brunswick. Through our Strategic Program Review, we noticed that there needed to be some efficiencies found. We found that, through the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, golf was certainly not in our mandate, and we needed to find ways to have it utilized in a better fashion.

Right now, we are working on a plan, trying to find some private investment and some private partners to make sure that we can do it in the best way possible. I must say that, moving forward, we have a lot of faith in working with our stakeholders in private business. The parks have been good partners with our various stakeholders. In fact, this year alone, we have seen an increase of about 9% in stays in the province, so it is good news.

Mr. Urquhart: Mactaquac Park, yes, is one of our provincial parks, but Mactaquac Park is under a special agreement with the people of New Brunswick, for the Mactaquac Park area. The agreement for the park was that it was going to be looked after and provided for. You cannot lump Mactaquac Park in with a bunch of real estate that we have bought and changed around the province over the years.

A lot of people who work at Mactaquac Park are making a good wage because of this. A number of our people in the area, because of the older families there, depend on the wages that they do make there. Can the minister tell us what the protection is for the people who are working there? Are they going to be taken into the government in other areas? Are we going to have job losses? Is the new company going to...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Ames: Throughout the expression of interest phase, we are still dealing with the negotiation part of it, so we cannot get into the fine details on that. I can assure you that all staff are valued. Regardless of what the end result may be, we want to ensure that the park is



maintained as a very respectable place for people to visit and recreate. As well, we want to make sure that, if and when possible, staff are of high calibre and are able to retain positions as much as possible too. However, we need to ensure that the negotiation phase is rolled out appropriately. Thank you.

Mr. Urquhart: With respect for the minister, I think that everyone in the Carleton-York and Fredericton areas knows who is taking it over and what their plan is. Our big problem is that, if you are not part of the solution, sometimes you become part of the problem. You have three area MLAs, especially, who have not been briefed on the takeover. Our people in the park are asking us what is going to be done to protect them.

We have been told... I can assure the minister that a lot of the employees are not being taken with the new company. I can assure him that a lot of the people who are there have been there for a long time and require other job training or protection. Will the minister assure me, at least, that we will be briefed prior to the takeover, and will he confirm that the protection of my workers will be looked into?

Hon. Mr. Ames: As with any negotiation process, we need to ensure that everything is made privy to the people we are dealing with. Throughout the stages, I have mentioned to the member opposite that I will keep him abreast with as much information as I can. I will give that to him today. My door is always open. We can chat any time he would like.

As far as this process goes, I am very eager and interested to see what kind of partnership and bond we can forge together with the partnerships that I foresee taking place in the spring of 2017. From then on, I think we will continue having a very great facility at Mactaquac Park.

Food Industry

Mr. Coon: Two years ago, I tabled a local food security bill that had the support of both the National Farmers Union and the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick as well as many, many New Brunswickers. It was intended to create the conditions for growth in the local food sector, but it was defeated at second reading. Since then, the government has implemented a local food strategy of its own that is failing to serve the local food market and grow the local food market. In fact, it is doing just the opposite.

One way of growing that market is to set targets for the procurement of local food in our hospitals. Will the government require our hospitals to use locally sourced food, which would also vastly improve the quality of meals served to the patients?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I thank the member opposite for bringing that forward. Yes, we have had a lot of discussions on local food. I know that the member opposite was involved and many stakeholders in the province have been involved in that process. There has been a lot of dialogue, a lot of discussion, and a lot of dialogue on how we move it forward. The whole



theme of this is: How do we change the culture? How do we make people feel good about buying local? That is what this is all about.

It is very important to note that 5% of our footprint in the province is in the agriculture sector. Eleven thousand people work in that industry, and it is very good. As a matter of fact, agriculture, fisheries, and forestry are how we got here, so it is very important that we build a culture. How do we build a demand? How do we foster that culture so that people will be searching out local foods?

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: New Brunswick's Local Food and Beverages Strategy was launched two months ago, yet we see local food retailers and suppliers such as Real Food Connections in Fredericton and Kredl's Corner Market in Hampton shutting down, leading to more capital flood out of New Brunswick. Many New Brunswickers believe that we should have the capacity to feed ourselves, but we seem to be going in the opposite direction.

Will the minister convene an emergency meeting of local food suppliers, retailers, and distributors to advise him on how the local food strategy can be strengthened to reverse this trend?

Mr. Speaker: Please stop the clock. We cannot have participation in any way from the gallery. During debate, it is reserved for the people who have won the honour of representing the people of New Brunswick. The people in the gallery are here to witness the debate, and that is it.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Imagine—\$2.6 billion is spent yearly by New Brunswickers, and we are producing about \$1.5 billion in food. Imagine if even half of that was spent on local food, supporting our local producers and creating jobs and economic activity. I think that is what is really key and really important here.

Many people were involved in the strategy that we brought about. We have had the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick involved, we have had the National Farmers Union involved, we have had the Community College of New Brunswick involved, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Education, and the Department of Tourism. This strategy is not a drop in the bucket, and it is not a silver bullet to cure all and make it happen right away. There has been a tremendous amount of consultation, and a tremendous amount of discussion has taken place with the education sector and the health sector as to how we can develop programs to work out the logistics so that we can get local food into our operations without...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Mr. Coon: The minister does not seem to understand. We are losing jobs in the local food sector because of an inadequate and poorly thought-out local food strategy. We are losing jobs from Kredl's Corner Market. We are losing jobs from Real Food Connections. In fact, combined, those two companies employed almost two thirds of the permanent jobs that the Energy East Pipeline project would create to distribute bitumen to international markets.

This government has been relentless in its efforts to facilitate the distribution of Alberta bitumen through New Brunswick to overseas markets, but it does not seem interested in facilitating the distribution of local food to New Brunswick consumers. Will the Premier meet with the owner of Kredl's Corner Market to save the 70 jobs that serve local families and distribute local food to New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I really appreciate the questions this morning, but the fact of the matter is that we just released the strategy. We just started the process, released the strategy, and released the framework as to which direction we are going in.

I just want to point out that the strategy includes three major objectives that we are all working on very diligently. I mentioned the departments that are involved in this. They are the Department of Health, the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, the Department of Social Development, and the Department of Tourism. There are a lot of pieces to this. It is about a culture. It is about making people feel good about what they have in their backyards and how we can direct people to local foods and to purchasing local foods. That is very important.

However, the strategy is to improve customer awareness. That is number one. That is the starting point. Next is to improve availability. On the availability side is how to work out logistics to get that product from the farm to the retailer. It is to improve support...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

First Nations

Mr. Fitch: I would like to ask the Minister of Finance about the negotiations surrounding the First Nations revenue-sharing agreement. The minister should know that the agreements that allow bands to keep 95% of all provincial tax collected in retail sales have expired and are currently being renegotiated.

It should be obvious to all involved that the agreements are not working very well. The cost of the agreements has exploded to over \$50 million in the past five years, an increase of 500%. The retail marketplace for off-reserve retailers has been totally distorted, with over 85 retailers closing, and even First Nations members are being treated unequally, with over 80% of the rebates going to only 4 of New Brunswick's 15 bands. Will the minister tell us when these negotiations are going to conclude and end this uneven playing field?



Hon. Ms. Rogers: We highly value the relations with our First Nations communities. We are very committed to continuing to work with our First Nations communities in New Brunswick. Our government did not agree with the approach of the previous government, which was to cancel agreements with First Nations. We want to continue to work with First Nations, and we value these relationships. We will work collaboratively with First Nations, as we do with other community groups. We are interested in modernizing and improving these relations. This is our number one priority—to have good working relationships and good collaborative relationships so that we can work together with our First Nations communities to develop and grow our economy for the good of New Brunswickers.

Mr. Fitch: I thought the number one priority was education.

Anyway, New Brunswick is the only province that has this type of revenue-sharing agreement, and it is a huge risk to the revenue stream. The minister said that protecting the revenue stream is a very important item. Will the minister consider looking at a new arrangement that is consistent with other provinces and that is more fair, not only to the First Nations members but also to the off-reserve retailers? Some 85 off-reserve retailers have closed. Will the minister consider other provincial jurisdictions in coming up with a new arrangement? When will this happen?

Hon. Ms. Rogers: I will say again that it is our very high priority, with the First Nations communities, to value their relationships and to work with them collaboratively in developing our economy and growing any opportunities that we have in our province. Great progress has been made in this initiative. We are interested in working with them to modernize the agreement. We will continue to put a high, high priority on including them as partners with us in our work.

Again, we did not take the same approach as the previous government, which wanted to cancel agreements. We value these relationships, and we are very committed to working collaboratively to make sure that any agreements we have are modernized and that they do include advancing First Nations communities as well as opportunities for New Brunswickers.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

