

December 15, 2016

[Original]

## French Immersion

**Mr. Higgs:** “Recycle New Brunswick” is a term that I have often used, and I use it as a phrase that does not apply to actual recycling, except in government—a government where we see old policies recycled and old decisions reversed. Here is a great example.

The Premier seems determined to look backward rather than forward on early French immersion, so let us look back to the previous Liberal government. The Premier is surrounded by seven members of that government who supported the change to the entry point of early French immersion. In fact, those seven members were part of the government that went to court to fight for the change away from the Grade 1 entry point for early French immersion—just the opposite of where they are today. What a coincidence.

In fact, the current Education Minister was one of those members who went to court to fight for the change away from Grade 1. Will the Minister of Education rise and tell the people of Bathurst and the rest of New Brunswick what has changed his mind to do a complete reversal on the issue of early immersion? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** It is hilarious to see that the members opposite are disappointed that I am getting up. Normally, it is the other way around.

I can tell you that I have to agree with the Leader of the Opposition. There is a lot of recycling happening in the Legislature, and it is the Leader of the Opposition’s questions. I do not understand his point. How can he say that with a straight face this morning when he is surrounded by a bunch of his caucus members who were part of the team that promised to restore French immersion to Grade 1, in 2010 when they campaigned? How can he say what he is saying this morning with a straight face when he is surrounded by a bunch of people in his caucus now...

Back in 2012, his government commissioned a report that ultimately recommended restoring French immersion to Grade 1. How can he say what he is saying this morning with a straight face when he was the Minister of Finance of a government that promised to restore French immersion to Grade 1, in 2010? Again, the commission recommended it in 2012, but the government did not get it done. We will.

**Mr. Higgs:** Unlike the Premier, I do not find it palatable and I certainly do not find it easy to talk on facts that do not exist. We did not promise to restore it back to Grade 1, and that is well recorded. We promised to do a survey. We did the survey, but guess what! We also found out that teachers did not want change. They wanted stability in the classroom, so we did not move



forward. We did not make it a political decision. We made a decision based on what the teachers told us.

The current Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure is one of the seven members now surrounding the Premier who went to court in 2008 to fight for the change from Grade 1 early immersion. On December 8, 2010, the minister issued a member's statement that read, in part:

*Mr. Willms also noted the significant improvement in Grade 2 literacy. It is no coincidence that that corresponds to changes we made to the entry level for [early] immersion. Now, the Tory government wants to undo that good policy, once again in the interest of politics.*

Would the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure care to stand up and explain to...

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

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I will tell you what is political, as the Leader of the Opposition likes to throw around, pretending that he is not political. I will tell you what is political: making a promise to get elected and then breaking that promise. What would be political would be having Craig Leonard, whom the Leader of the Opposition...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** ...sat with in Cabinet for four years, running around Fredericton and talking about how his government, if elected, would restore French immersion to Grade 1 and talking about how terrible it was...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** ...that the previous government took French immersion away from Grade 1 and then getting elected and not delivering on his promise to the people of Fredericton. That would be political.

What is not political, and what is responsible and good governance, is keeping our promises by making promises that we can keep. That is exactly what we did in 2014. We promised to restore French immersion to Grade 1 based on a report in 2012 commissioned by the previous government.

**Mr. Higgs:** A promise without a plan. What have we seen over and over and over again from this government? A promise without a plan. If the government members want to check the facts, I would go back and say: Okay, when did we promise that? The fact is, we did not.



The previous Liberal government cited streaming as one of the reasons to change the Grade 1 entry point for early immersion. In 2008, the previous government said that the early immersion program created streaming. It meant children with learning and behavioural problems stayed in the basic English program while more privileged students escaped to the smaller classes of early French immersion.

The Minister of Energy was another member of the previous Liberal government who went to court to fight for the change away from Grade 1 early immersion. Will the Minister of Energy get up and tell the people of Charlotte-The Isles and all the rest of New Brunswick why he has abandoned his previous position? Is it just politics?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** These are great questions this morning. Clearly, the opposition office did not work very hard yesterday copying and pasting the Leader of the Opposition's questions.

I have to say that I do not understand how the Leader of the Opposition continuously ignores the fact that a report was done in 2012, commissioned by the government of the Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister of Finance. This report, within the parameters given to it by the government in which the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance, listened to experts, stakeholders, teachers, students, and New Brunswickers and came to the conclusion that, yes, indeed, we should restore French immersion to Grade 1. That was done in 2012.

In 2014, based on this very exhaustive and inclusive report, we, as a political party, made the promise that we would restore French immersion to Grade 1, because it is the right thing to do. We gained the confidence of New Brunswick, and we are now fulfilling our commitments, including restoring French immersion to Grade 1.

**Mr. Higgs:** In fact, there are no facts to say that it is the right thing to do. There is no plan that says that. The most ironic thing, I would say, is that I remember being with the previous government and we were allowed to speak. It was a great, novel opportunity. We had to speak on our behalf and defend our positions. Obviously, that is not the case with what we see from this government.

Seven members of the previous Cabinet were part of the previous Liberal government that went to court to move early French immersion to Grade 1. They were citing a report that stated that, in the basic core program, where most New Brunswick students are educated, only 28 of the 55 000 students reached the provincial standard of intermediate oral proficiency in French in 2008. That is a rate of 0.68%. The report claimed that it works out to a staggering cost of \$367 000 per child.

The Minister of Service New Brunswick was one of the members of the previous government who went to court to move early immersion away from Grade 1. Would the minister like to tell the people of Saint John and all of New Brunswick what has caused him to change his mind, or will he, too, not be allowed to speak?



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The Leader of the Opposition says that there are no facts. Every report and every expert—or, at least, the vast majority—would say that learning a second language earlier is better. Those are the facts. In fact, the Education Critic for the opposition has said it himself: Earlier is better.

When the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance, he had the right to speak—that is true, I saw him speak—but he did not have the right to act. In fact, when he would speak against the previous government, that was what he would say. He would say that he was not able to do everything that he wanted to do because of the politics of his caucus. He said that he was not able to cut as much as he would have liked to cut—which was amazing, because he cut pretty well when he was Minister of Finance. Yes, he cut into education, but he wanted to cut more. That is why we are so adamant that we will work hard to continue to gain the confidence of New Brunswickers so that we can stop the Leader of the Opposition with his approach of cutting into education and health care.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** Do you know what? I also remember that, when we were in government, we had a team of over 40. It must be difficult to work with a team of one.

The Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour was a member of the previous Liberal government that went to court in 2008 to move early immersion away from Grade 1. Back then, poor results, poor participation, and the streaming effect were all used as reasons to make the change away from the Grade 1 immersion program. Would the minister care to get up and tell the people of Campbellton-Dalhousie and the rest of New Brunswick what caused him to do a 180 on this issue? What has changed, and where is the courage of his convictions? Other than politics, what reason can the minister give for turning tail on the position that he, along with his colleagues in the previous Liberal government, took?

How can this government stand up with a complete reversal of a policy that was not working but that we are now going to put in place again? This defies logic.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We have said numerous times why this decision is being made.

[*Translation*]

In 2012, a report was in fact sanctioned by the government of the time, in which the current Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance. This report had been written by two former Ministers of Education—one Liberal and one Conservative—who listened to New Brunswickers. In fact, they consulted hundreds of men and women in the province.



They then came to the conclusion that early French immersion starting in Grade 1 was the best thing for the young people of this province.

This work was done in 2012, two years before the election campaign. In 2014, New Brunswickers put their trust in us, and we promised and committed to setting the early French immersion entry point at Grade 1; we are keeping this promise.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Higgs:** Yesterday, I cited a report from 2002 that you could basically reissue again today, because the situation is the very same, only worse. There is not much to hang your hat on when all you say is... Now, it is hundreds of people. Yesterday, the number that was used was 200, so I am sure that it will keep expanding, about the previous report that was done and that addressed one issue—one issue. It did not address all these other issues of streaming, class composition, and all the issues that classroom teachers face.

In 2008, the previous Liberal government felt that it had sufficient reasons to go to court and fight to move early French immersion away from Grade 1. It clearly thought that it was right, and it spent a lot political capital and taxpayers' money fighting for the change. The Minister of Health was one of the members of the previous Liberal government, perhaps the most infamous former member of that government and for many reasons. Can the minister get up and tell the people of Shediac and all of New Brunswick why he has had a complete reversal of his support for changing early immersion from Grade 1? Did the Premier order him to change his mind, or was he not allowed to express his mind?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** It was in fact the previous government that had commissioned two former Ministers of Education of our province to write a report to give us suggestions and, ultimately, recommendations on early French immersion.

It was the current Leader of the Opposition who, when he was Minister of Finance, decided with his government to establish the parameters for this study and this report. In fact, we saw that consultations had taken place and that a significant number of people in the province had made suggestions and expressed their concerns. This report was then released, clearly indicating that early French immersion starting in Grade 1 was the approach we should take in New Brunswick.

So, I will repeat this probably for the 50th time: It is because of the aforementioned factors that we made the decision to restore the early French immersion entry point to Grade 1.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.



**Mr. Higgs:** It was not a decision based on fact. It was a decision based on politics. We did not proceed because all the issues were not being dealt with. It was one factor of a complex issue, on which every teacher will say: We need to do better. We need to make a difference. We need to change messing in the classroom.

But this government has a 10-year plan, and then it has a political plan. Neither one of them is a detailed plan. The Premier is practically surrounded by members of the previous Liberal government who changed the entry point for early French immersion.

The Minister of Justice and Public Safety is one of the members of the former Liberal government who fought in court to change the early immersion entry point. In fact, I think that there was a standing vote, where they all stood up and said: We are going to change it. Here we go again. Can the minister explain to the House what evidence there is that caused him to change his mind and to support the Premier's political decision to change the early immersion entry point back to Grade 1?

Can one minister stand up with a reason? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The Leader of the Opposition should be aware that, every time he tries to use the same catch phrase... You cannot get more political than that. I ask him to stop calling it a political decision after I have answered about 50 times that this is a decision based on a report that was commissioned by the previous government, in which he was the Minister of Finance.

I have to ask him again: Why is he advocating at times that we have to completely overhaul and change the system because, in his opinion, education is broken and in crisis in New Brunswick but then, in the same day, he says that we need stability? I have to go to this question because of that, because of this consistent two-way talk. He has a fixation on French immersion. There is no doubt about it. Can I then at least assume that he agrees with everything else in our 10-year education plans—he thinks that the plans are solid? Because he has some very strange fixation with French immersion, I have to think that the rest of our plans are great. Are they not?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. Higgs:** Denial is always the hardest thing to overcome. Our system is broken. We can fix it, but we cannot fix it by being in denial. Our statistics show that we are—what?—ninth in the country, but we are denying that. Our system shows that we are, in every category, falling behind. Our system shows that, after 45 years, less than 10% of the kids are graduating as being fully bilingual. What is wrong? We will not listen to the teachers. We invent policies right here and think that we are doing better because it attracts a vote here and it attracts a vote there.

The 10-year plan needs a whole lot of work, but I want to be part of a 10-year plan and sign off on it now so we will not mess with it in the future—no government will mess with it in the future. But, no, we cannot focus on that. We create a political decision that was made up after the 10-year plan. It was not even part of the 10-year plan. How do you rationalize that, other



than politics? I would say to the Premier: Let's get together on a 10-year plan. Let's scrap this notion that teachers want to have more confusion in their room, because they do not. Let's focus on ten years.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am not sure where to start. Again, I do not understand why he does not get it. The opposition was invited to participate in the development of the 10-year education plans. I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition if, during his caucus meeting, when they were trying to decide who would help us, he did not raise his hand to say: I would like to be part of it. They had members of the opposition give us advice and play a part in the 10-year education plans.

He then says that the 10-year education plans need a whole lot of work. I have to ask: If the 10-year education plans need "a whole lot of work", as the Leader of the Opposition would say, why is he so fixated on French immersion? Why would he not bring up some of his other concerns? All he has done for the last 12 question periods—14 question periods—is to say that the system is broken and the system is in crisis. He has no solutions other than to cut in education and to have some sick fixation with French immersion.

### District Education Councils

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** The Premier seems to want to hear some of our other concerns about education, so I am happy to raise some of those here for him today. Since he has been taking the questions on education, maybe he will take some of mine.

I would like to know, just generally, what the Gallant government sees as the role of the district education councils in determining the capital investment priorities of the government.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I will allow the Minister of Education to get into the details of the question. I have to say, though, that I just hope that the New Brunswickers watching can see the opposition members. This is what they do every day. The Leader of the Opposition is criticizing us and is upset that I am getting up, taking his questions. Then we have one of the critics get up and say that, no, he wants me to take the questions. It is just ironic.

We are working as a team over here to ensure that we make the right investments—make the right investments for our economy and social fabric. In our opinion, there is no better investment that we can possibly make than in education. It helps our economy, it helps our social fabric, and it is by far the best way that we can give opportunity to all New Brunswickers. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition is convinced that there is enough money in education. He wants to cut as he did previously. We do not, and we are going to invest more.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** I asked a very straightforward policy question, and I got nothing but obfuscation from the Premier today.



Yesterday, the Premier and his government tabled their capital budget, and that lays out all the building projects for the coming year. On October 27, the district education council of Anglophone West School District made a recommendation to government that suggested that the two top priorities in that school district be improvements to Leo Hayes High School and a new school in Hanwell. I would like to know why those were not reflected in yesterday's capital budget.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** Working with the district education councils is a local approach, where we look at capital projects throughout the province. I have to say that I have met with many of the DEC's throughout the province. Yesterday, we tabled our capital budget, which is an increase... Actually, we increased by 3.1% the year before. We have a good capital project coming up, with many schools in the details to come.

When the education councils were introduced, the intent was to take a community approach to educating by putting decisions with the district education councils. Part of the process is that we will do public consultation to move forward with these projects. Our long-term approach for major capital projects is a transparent and consultative process to be able to apply to schools equally throughout the province. We are going to continue to work on this year. When we make the final decision, we will discuss it with the Legislature and the member can ask those questions...

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

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** Well, there is no surprise. I asked a question of the Premier—I got bluster. I asked a question of the Minister of Education—again, I got bluster.

The fact remains that the district education council is elected specifically to provide recommendations to government on these matters. It made its recommendation in October, in time for the capital budget process, yet those recommendations are not reflected in the budget that was tabled yesterday. The minister said that he is going to consult. The minister said that he is transparent. I would like to have some consultation. I would like some transparency now.

The district education council made a recommendation. It was very clear. It was part of the process. Yet, that recommendation—the recommendation of an elected board that is put in place, elected by the people, to provide those recommendations—was not reflected in the budget. What is the plan? Are we going to see that in next year's budget? When is there going to be a school for Hanwell, and when are we going to see improvements to Leo Hayes High School?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** You hear the opposition complain every time about cuts, cuts, cuts. Now, we have a member so fixated on making sure that he can get something in his own riding... The member will have the time when the estimates come up. He knows exactly how this works in the Legislature.





We tabled our capital budget yesterday, and we are going to continue to make record investments in midlife upgrades throughout the province. There is a fair process that this has to go through. It is very detailed, and we will work with our district education councils on that.

The member opposite is looking for more and more and more, yet, on the other hand, he is saying that we are spending too much money. So, what is it? We on this side of the House are really confused about the members opposite asking questions about paving their streets and building their new schools.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** They want everything, but when it comes time for us to table the capital budget, they say that we are spending too much money. Which way is it?

### **Enbridge Gas New Brunswick**

**Mr. Stewart:** This deal for Enbridge brings a lot of uncertainty for New Brunswick's 12 000 gas customers. The government is following the advice of Enbridge, and it appears that most customers do not know what is coming. I doubt that most of them are aware that Enbridge is currently seeking a 30% increase for 2017.

I would like to ask the minister whether he has planned an adjustment in 2018 and 2019 if the current 30% increase that Enbridge applied for in 2017 is accepted by the Energy and Utilities Board.

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** I am hoping that, this year, my kids are going to get me some more sticky notes because I am using some sticky notes.

It is Day 41 since the agreement was announced in the provincial capital. On November 8, the documents were tabled in the House. What we have seen so far from the opposition members, as far as questions go... The substantiveness of the questions in question period, along with what took place in committee, is deplorable. There were no questions about the bill.

They talked about conflict of interest. They talked about the Enbridge lawyers. They talked about a salmon pool in the Miramichi. They talked about confidential legal advice, and they were annoyed about what the agreement was called in our press release. They even went so far as to say that they felt that the documents that we tabled in the House should have been online. They spent 20 minutes on that. Can you imagine spending 20 minutes on that part of it?

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



**Mr. Stewart:** This is the party that tried to sell NB Power. This is the party where nobody knows where the money from Atcon went. This is the party that just gave a 50-year monopoly to Enbridge Gas. This is the party that is currently being investigated. It has been investigated more than once, and I expect more to come.

Has the government been communicating with the 12 000 New Brunswickers who are Enbridge Gas customers? Do they know what might happen in three years' time?

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** Still no substance. With what happened a few moments ago, maybe we should get him some Kleenex or paper towels. While he was reaching for his phone to take the call from Craig Leonard, he spilled his coffee all over his desk so it messed up his notes.

I want to tell you a little fact, a little something that is rather upsetting. Yesterday, during committee, do you know what he said to my staff? He said: You are nothing but a bunch of liars. Is that the way to act in this House? No, it is not. No, it is not.

I can tell you one thing: The member for Fredericton West-Hanwell had some substantive questions yesterday. They made sense. We had a great conversation. As a matter of fact, there is leadership material there, as far as I am concerned. I do not know what is happening with the Leader of the Opposition. I do not know why he cannot get a hold of his caucus members and say: Look, we really need to drill down to the importance of what this bill is all about and what is taking place.

Quite frankly, to treat civil servants...

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

**Mr. Stewart:** The minister should not be so sad. He is so upset today. What is wrong? You just gave your buddy Mr. Hoyt a 50-year monopoly. What are you getting out of the deal? That is what I want to know. What is the minister getting out of this deal? What is the Premier getting out of this deal? What is the Liberal Party of New Brunswick getting out of this deal? That is what we on this side of the House want to know.

Do you know what? My water spilled on me. Do you want to ridicule me for that? You should be ashamed of yourselves. The minister should be ashamed of himself here today. It is despicable.

I want to know right now why the members opposite would sign a 50-year monopoly with this company. How are the investigations going anyway?

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** I ain't ashamed at all when I stand up in the House to answer that member.

(Interjections.)



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

**Hon. Mr. Doucet:** The belligerence that he has shown to civil servants in calling them liars... In the meantime, the Leader of the Opposition is supporting him. He thinks he is doing a great job. Is this the new way of doing business?

The fact of the matter is that we have not even had the chance to talk about the merits of the bill. The bill removes the financial risk of a lawsuit totaling more than \$800 million, without one cent of taxpayers' money. It helps to stabilize rates for all sectors, including the commercial and industrial sectors. It provides some certainty against large increases for the customer class through Energy and Utilities Board oversight. It establishes rate caps of 3% for residential and 0% for the commercial class in 2018 and 2019. It subjects any further rate increase to approval by the Energy and Utilities Board, providing rate hike protection in the same way that NB Power...

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

**Mr. Higgs:** I want to respond here. We are very concerned about agreeing to a deal in a very similar format to what has already proven to be a very poor business case, which was done 20 years ago. Here we are, perpetuating a poor business deal. Why has this government had to raise taxes by \$500 million over the past year, across every sector in this province? Why do we have to afford the government's spending spree? Why do we need to do these things? It is because we make such poor agreements. We make such poor deals. I do not know whether it is because of not understanding the deal. I do not know what influences this process, but it certainly is not fact. This is a process that defies logic. It does not make sense.

Our concern from the very beginning has been this: Why would you perpetuate a deal that has proven to be unsuccessful, when it would end in 2019? It just does not make sense.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** For starters, when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Finance, he was part of a government that ripped up a contract that made us potentially liable for \$800 million. That would not have been the ratepayers—that would have been New Brunswickers—who would be on the hook for that. We were able, through negotiations, as the previous government tried to do, to get an agreement, and it is a good agreement. It is one in which we are going to have stable rates for New Brunswickers and for businesses. We are also going to have the EUB play its role in 2019, providing the appropriate oversight.

I have to ask the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition this, though, if he wants to get up on his feet after what we just saw in terms of the questions: Does he agree with his colleague and the way he called some of the people working at the Department of Energy liars? Does he agree with that? Does he agree with the member for Riverview asking the Minister of Finance how much it cost the government to print some laws on paper? Does he agree with the way his caucus has been acting?



**Mr. Higgs:** We offered a solution. Repeal our own bill. Repeal Bill 18. Just go back to square one, as of 2012. Do you know what that does? It resets the clock.

I never believed that the lawsuit was real or significant, and it would have been easily proven that it was not. However, if it is such a concern, repeal Bill 18. Then you have not tied this province for the next 50 years, and you have not closed the market for customers in central New Brunswick and in the north. Where are they going to get gas? You have given a monopoly to a company and said: Oh, that is okay. We are going to carry on with a business plan that was flawed from the very beginning. Is there a misunderstanding of business practices with this government? Yes, bad deals have been made forever, but, at some point, you have to do better.

We were prepared to repeal our own deal and support it. It would have taken it all off the table. Then, in 2019, you could negotiate a deal that was right for New Brunswick. Why would we not do that?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The Leader of the Opposition argues that we should repeal the Act passed by the former government. However, what would happen then? It would put us in a position where we would still have to conduct negotiations. We accomplished what the previous government was unable to do: It tried to reach an agreement with Enbridge Gas New Brunswick, but did not manage to do so. We reached an agreement that will be good for New Brunswickers and for our economy and that will ensure we have stable rates. Also, the New Brunswick Energy and Utilities Board will play its role starting in 2019.

*[Original]*

I have to ask the Leader of the Opposition this today. He is getting up and talking about spending sprees. He has his caucus members getting up to talk about wanting roads paved, schools upgraded, and even new schools in their ridings. Although there is no consistency on the opposite side of the aisle, there is consistency here. We are making strategic investments to grow the economy and to ensure that we improve education and health care in our province.

