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FRENCH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Education announced a new French second language learning program, which has been met with skepticism and disbelief by many parents and teachers. For months, they have been asking for stability and resources to ensure the best possible outcomes for students whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic as well as by the scarce classroom resources. They have warned that this program is being rushed, and the Premier has even admitted that it is being rushed for political purposes, as he does not want it to be done in an election year. The experts, the teachers, and the parents—everyone involved—have said that this will put added pressure on the system, that this is rushed, and that the government should slow down.

I want to know what additional budgetary resources the minister is committing to, to stabilize the system and to introduce this new program.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, I was excited to announce the new approach that we are taking to teach French to all students in our province's Anglophone sector. It is a goal that we, as an inclusive province, need to have, and our wanting to have a bilingual population is, I think, something that is extremely important.

At the same time as we are doing that, we are also going to be able to look at reading recovery so that we will have students reading at grade level by the end of Grade 2. That is something that I was asked questions about after Kelly Lamrock gave his speech here just a short while ago.

We are prepared to commit the resources necessary to ensure the success of this program. I know that it has been called many things. It is New Brunswick's innovative immersion framework. We are going to continue with our consultations. We are going to ensure...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, it has been said that 60 additional French language teachers will be required to make this program work in the current system. We know that the Auditor General has made reports to say that the tinkering with the French immersion program over the last number of years—I think we are up to three changes now in 13 years—should stop and to stop doing this. Stop putting pressure on the system. We are now going to be losing teachers from the English system. Those teachers are now teaching French second language, and they are probably going to go back to the Francophone system because of the uncertainty here. Some areas might be able to offer the program, and some might not. It might be delayed in parts of the province.

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I want to know how this minister plans to hire those 60 additional teachers. Where will they come from? Will the recruitment of these teachers have a negative impact on the Francophone school system? Can he answer those questions, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recruitment of new teachers is an ongoing exercise, and in terms of looking for teachers who can teach French, it is not one that is new. When I worked at the district office and was responsible for French second language and French immersion, there was one available French teacher to hire in the province. This is not a new thing. We are continuing the work on hiring, as soon as possible, teachers. We are doing it today, as we speak, and we are going to continue to do it in the future.

We cannot take teachers from one system to the other, because that does not resolve any issues. However, there are D-contract teachers who will look for B-contract positions or even other D-contract positions because they want to work next year. If it happens that teachers teaching in one sector see a job in another sector, then they will apply for that. If they are successful, then they are successful. That is what happens today. It is nothing new.

It is a challenge. We are going to face the challenge head-on. We are going to find the resources that we need. This program will be a great success.

[*Translation*]

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, there is already a shortage of teachers in the education system; the minister just admitted that. We know that the NBTA warned us that the system is already very fragile and under pressure, and that these changes will only make the situation worse.

As I said, the decision to accelerate the rollout of the program was only made for political reasons. There is no recruitment plan or strategy. The minister says that we are continuing to recruit every day, but we know that the current immersion program is the best way to teach French as a second language to our students. In fact, a significant number of our teachers who now teach French immersion were trained in the current French immersion system in New Brunswick.

So, I would like to know whether the minister has considered the negative impact this change will have on the recruitment and training of our future French immersion teachers in New Brunswick.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These changes will not have any negative impact on learning or our teachers. At some point, it is... I do not know whether this is a secret in New Brunswick, but there are some teachers in our province who teach a program called French immersion without having the necessary training. It is not their fault, but they do not have the

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necessary training. They were hired because somebody had to teach this program. So, everywhere in our province, there are classrooms in which parents have the impression that there is an immersion program, but it is not true. What we will do is ensure that we have bilingual people in our province. Next year, we will start with kindergarten and Grade 1.

[Original]

ELECTIONS

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to pivot now. I have just one last question today, and it is for the Premier. It could be my last question of the fall session, barring any time that might be left over at the end. I have been fortunate and privileged to sit in this chair as Leader of the Official Opposition. Allowing me this privilege is something for which I will be forever grateful to the leader. But as we know, she wants to get a seat in this House and she wants to assume this chair. We are ready to back her and to go into battle with Susan Holt as the Leader of the Official Opposition once she gets elected to this House.

I now want to know when the Premier will call the by-elections. I asked him when we first started the session, and at the time, he said it was still hypothetical. We had two members who were still sitting here who had not yet resigned their seats. But now we know, and we hope that there is going to be royal assent today on our bill that we passed to have those elections held within six months. Roger Melanson resigned September 21 or thereabouts, so the by-elections should happen in March or May of next year. Is the Premier prepared to do that?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. To the Leader of the Opposition, I agree. Elections should be held within six months. You mentioned having them in March, April, or May, but early—getting through the winter and into the opening of spring—and I see no reason to delay that. Thank you.

FRENCH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Mrs. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, many New Brunswickers have expressed their profound disappointment with this government's decision to replace French immersion with a watered-down French language program that will lessen the opportunity for students to be bilingual. Would the minister please provide more insight into what he believes is a conversational level of French that graduates of this program will achieve? In other words, what specific French language skills will they have—not only oral skills but also writing and reading skills?

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Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am confounded by the question. In New Brunswick, we have had an immersion program, in which we offered a 50-50 split between English and French instruction. It had marvelous results—great results—that equaled and exceeded the current results from the early immersion program. Not only that, but many places in Ontario have a model of 50% English and 50% French, which I believe is supported by Canadian Parents for French Ontario. I am not quite sure—I am not quite sure—why someone would think that we are watering something down when we want to ensure that all students have the ability to converse in French.

Mrs. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, that brings me many, many more questions. The minister is talking about a pilot that was in place in the Bathurst area 30 years ago. Is that the pilot that the department will be using as the new program for French learning?

I also have these questions: Is being proficient in French the new standard for hiring future government employees? Will that be the norm? Will that be the standard? With respect to the language proficiency of students in this new language program, how will that be evaluated?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. With respect to that question, we said that we were going to move and to use the Common European Framework to evaluate our students and their language proficiency, which in terms of conversational French, intermediate, as it was previously known, or Level 3 in the different forms that we measured, would be the minimum standard that we are looking for—the minimum standard.

These are the other questions: Will students be prepared to work in the government, and will they need proficient language skills to work for our government? Well, that is what we have now. Of course, that is what we are going to continue to look for. We would like people who have the capacity to speak both languages to serve all our citizens in both official languages. We will get there with this program. It is an excellent program. It was a 10-year pilot in Bathurst. It was not a one-year blip.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, parents have a lot of questions about this new program, and its design seems to indicate that older students will spend less time learning French. How can reducing the intensity of French learning help achieve language goals? Since this program will be offered from kindergarten to Grade 8, at least for now, what will the French learning program be in high school?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As for percentages, it depends on how you see it. If you compare

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what we are already doing with a small group of students, with regard to the percentage of French teaching to which they have access, and we apply that to all our students, that is what they will be getting. I do not know whether the opposition members ask the same questions about Ontario, where what we are going to do is already being done. As for high school, it will not really change. Students will be able to continue learning French as they do today to get enrichment in other classes, such as history, science, or mathematics. Everything that we can teach that is already being taught in our high schools will be available.

[Original]

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Bill 10 has now passed third reading, the Minister of Finance has taken care of all his well-to-do friends with nice tax cuts, and he has put down a capital budget with increases to take care of all those inflationary pressures. Those are fancy words used by budget guys. For most of us, we just call it the cost of living, and a whole bunch of people are struggling with it. For those people, can the minister finally tell us—now that his agenda seems to have cleared up—what the help that he has been promising all along is actually going to be?

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. Do you know what? For all those people—all these rich people, as he said—that we are helping out along the way, he should remember that 64% of taxpayers are getting reductions on the first two brackets. The first thing we released was a reduction to the first two brackets. We released reductions to the first two brackets, and then we raised the basic personal amount. Thanks to that, 64% of New Brunswickers are being helped.

Let's talk about some other help for low-income New Brunswickers. There is new public housing. The minimum wage increase—we talked about that. There are various initiatives for social assistance reform. There is \$2 million for food banks, and there is \$20 million for the Emergency Fuel and Food Benefit, targeting the most vulnerable citizens. How about from November to April? Eligible social assistance clients can receive \$150 per month for the Electric Fuel Supplement or \$145 per month for the Non-Electric Fuel Supplement.

You say that we are not doing anything for the people who are hurting in New Brunswick. You are absolutely wrong. This government takes care of New Brunswickers.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister is primed, but that is not what I asked. I did not say that he is doing nothing. I am just coming back to his words. All along, when he has been talking in the media and in the House about these huge surpluses, he has kept saying that help is coming, help is coming. I do not want to talk about the Fuel and Food Benefit and the \$400 or \$200 that you gave last April. That is not paying the food bill right now.

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You said that things are coming. What are they? What are they? These are your own words. I am just looking to follow up. Let's not go through the same list again. Just come up with the new stuff and all this new energy that you are going to bring to your file.

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Speaking of energy, my friend over in the Department of Natural Resources, the minister from Albert County... Yes, the Enhanced Energy Savings Program. Absolutely, it is a gift that keeps on giving. When you get a mini-split system, it saves you money this year, next year, the year after that, and the year after that.

What else is the government doing? There are tax programs to benefit low-income New Brunswickers. There are the New Brunswick HST credit, the low-income tax reduction, the New Brunswick child tax benefit, the New Brunswick working income supplement, and the New Brunswick School Supplement program. It continues on and on and on. What are we doing to help low-income New Brunswickers? We are doing that and more. There will be more in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned for the Minister of Finance. I fear that he will soon be visited by three nocturnal guests: the ghost of budgets past, the ghost of budgets present, and the scariest of them all for the minister, the ghost of audited results to come. As surpluses continue to grow and grow, it becomes more difficult for him to explain to the Bob Cratchits of New Brunswick why he cannot provide help for all the Tiny Tims of the province. It is because he chooses to hold on tightly to all his coin for fear of needs to come. Just as Ebenezer of another tale was able to find out, it is never too late to make a change.

There is still time before Christmas. It is never too late. The minister keeps telling us that there is more help to come for those in need. Can the minister commit to providing that help now, before Christmas?

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Mr. Speaker, that is beautiful. Now if the member for Kent South can top that, I will be impressed. That was really good, other than not ending with a little bit of singing, which would have been a nice touch.

I will gladly go on with more things that we are doing for New Brunswickers. The \$550 Emergency Fuel Benefit can be provided to individuals who are experiencing winter hardship and who are heating with oil, wood, or electricity. That continues. How about more emergency efficiency programs available for New Brunswickers to reduce the cost of home heating? We are constantly working on those. The Fuel and Food Benefit—stay tuned, Mr. Speaker, to the Fuel and Food Benefit. Stay tuned. There could be something very special, maybe something in the socks for New Brunswickers.

I do not do it as well as the member across the way, Mr. Speaker, but thank you very much.

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MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Mr. Speaker, the announcement of eight youth mental health beds in Moncton is good news. In 2019, despite the fact that it was 90% complete, this government canceled the youth mental health centre in Campbellton and announced that it would be built in Moncton. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Has the project started? Is it still in the planning stage? If so, how far along is it, and when do you expect shovels to go in the ground?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a good-news announcement, part of the plan for allowing people to have better access to mental health and addiction services. This Centre of Excellence for Youth is going to be an added piece of the puzzle to have two sections of the province covered. We will be serving the north and the south. I and a number of my colleagues went to the site and took a picture. The shovels are not in the ground just yet. The construction is due to start next year, and that centre will be up and running within a couple of years after that. It is good news, and I appreciate the member opposite highlighting that here today in the last question period of the session.

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): I am not sure who is going to answer this one, but, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that the project that was canceled by this government was for a 15-bed facility, with a total cost of \$14.4 million, at \$960 000 per bed. The proposed facility of 8 beds comes in at \$29.4 million, at \$3.675 million per bed, almost four times the cost. The cost of material and labour has not gone up that much. Can either minister please explain the difference in cost?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, here, again, we have the opposition members doing two things. The first thing is saying that they want additional services, and the second is that they are now complaining about the costs. We, as a government, are willing to invest in the people in New Brunswick. We are willing to invest in bricks and mortar to make sure that people receive service.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it is a challenge when you are here trying to tell folks how much you respect them and how much you appreciate them. I do want to take this moment to say how much this government respects all the people who work in health care, especially those who are going to be working over the Christmas holidays. We really do appreciate that.

Again, on the numbers that the member quoted, we are willing to invest in health care and we are willing to make sure that those investments have a good return for the people who need the services when they need them. Thank you very much.

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PESTICIDES

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we rely on the diversity of plants and animals in our soils, on land, in the ocean, and in the air to make New Brunswick habitable. But more than 1 000 species in our province are imperiled or vulnerable. One of the drivers of this biodiversity loss is the overuse of pesticides. At the Biodiversity Summit in Montreal, the nations of the world are trying to reach an agreement on a target to reduce pesticide use.

The last time the New Brunswick government undertook an initiative to reduce pesticide use was in 2009, for cosmetic pesticides, and it was successful. That was also the year that New Brunswick issued its first and last biodiversity conservation strategy, which remains unimplemented, on the shelf. The Minister of Environment is responsible for pesticide use and administers the *Pesticides Control Act* here in New Brunswick. Does he have any plans to pursue the reduction of pesticide use in forestry, agriculture, or aquaculture? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question from across the way. As the member would know, during our standing committee meeting last week, we received presentations and documents.

That is presently back with our Climate Change Secretariat in the Department of Environment, which is looking at ways to make some possible changes moving forward. I cannot speak to those exact changes today, but plans are in the works. Changes are coming in some areas. I know that for the watercourses, too, they are looking at different ways of addressing some of the areas and amounts that are being sprayed and so on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss in our rivers and bays along our coasts is nutrient pollution. The overloading of phosphorus in fresh water and nitrogen in salt water triggers massive algal blooms, which suck the oxygen out of the water as they die off. Twenty years ago the Conservation Council's research revealed that the bays and estuaries in Tracadie, Cocagne, Bouctouche, and Shediac were suffering from nutrient pollution. The research also revealed that hundreds of natural oyster beds had been buried under many metres of sediment from decomposed algal blooms. A target to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution is also being negotiated, as we speak, in Montreal at the biodiversity summit.

Does the minister responsible for pollution control have any plans to prevent nitrogen and phosphorus pollution from entering our rivers and coastal waters?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, for the question from across the way. We are not involved this



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year with the summit in Montreal. I will take the question under advisement and look into it with respect to the ecosystem and the oyster beds that the member mentioned. We know that there are changes coming with climate change and there are changes coming to the environment in the coastal waters and the fisheries. We will take the question under advisement and get back to you when we can. Thank you.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the youth mental health beds, the minister does not know whether the planning has started and he cannot explain the difference in costs. Let me offer a solution for him. The Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture has been adamant that there are quicker and less expensive processes to build large construction projects. My last question to the minister is this: Will this project be subject to the *Crown Construction Contracts Act*, or has the minister considered constituting a board of ordinary citizens to speed up the project and bring it in at a better cost?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think I was pretty clear in the answers that I gave earlier. The design work will start in 2023, and the project will hopefully be completed by 2026. As mentioned earlier, the cost is about \$29.4 million. This is an investment in the youth of our province. That facility will be for youth aged 12 to 18. Again, having the two centres of excellence in the province will make sure that there are services in the north and services in the south. It will be easier to attract employees to two smaller centres as opposed to one larger one. This is part of our Health Plan, which is working and moving forward. Again, we are making the investments that need to be made for mental health and addictions care for youth who need treatment. That is good government. That is making progress.

FRENCH IMMERSION

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to finish with the Minister of Education and the French immersion rollout that this government is looking to do. The government is talking about having consultations in the new year and saying that it will hear from parents, teachers, and experts, I imagine, on this. I want to know what government has done up to this point. Do those members have earplugs? All those stakeholders have been voicing their concerns. They have been telling us that the program is rushed and that they are not able to get the pieces in place by the start of fall 2023. Why is the government saying that it is going to have consultations in January, February, and March to hear from these people when these people have been so vocal over the past little while since it came out that the government is going to abolish French immersion?

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What is the minister's plan with respect to consultations that are happening in the new year? Is he ready to listen to the people, or is this a fait accompli?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

It is not a fait accompli.

[*Original*]

As I said yesterday, we have announced the framework. We have had consultations in New Brunswick for two years. We have consulted with parents, we have consulted with teachers, and we have consulted with students. We are going to continue those consultations into the new year. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is because New Brunswickers—teachers, students, and parents—have great ideas. There are wonderful ideas out there that we can incorporate into this framework—I am positive. That is what we want to do. That is why we are having consultations. That is why, yesterday, we launched an online survey for everyone in New Brunswick to participate in. I am going to do something new in my life. I am going to have two Facebook Live sessions, and those will be accessible to—I do not know—everybody, I guess. It is going to be a new experience for me.

I do have earplugs. I do not wear them in here, and I do not wear them outside.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I hope that the Minister of Education does not wear earplugs, but it does seem that he has been wearing them. When parents come and speak out and he hears them—I do not know if he is listening, but he is hearing them—he is accusing them of political stunts. That is unacceptable for a minister. Now he is talking about running a survey. I do not know if it is the same survey that the former Minister of Education launched—a monkey survey or whatever kind of platform was used at the time.

I want to know why we cannot maintain the French immersion program. You know, it is a worthy goal to get everyone to a conversational level of French. But why are we bringing some down to bring others up? Let's bring some up, but let's maintain what we have for the ones who are excelling in French, who are going beyond a conversational level of French. The resources that are going to be required are the same ones that could be used to maintain the French immersion program and make it the best program it can be. So why do we not implement that type of program?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the Acting Leader of the



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Opposition for the job he has been doing. I am a little concerned that he is so worked up this morning.

So, why are we doing what we are doing? It is quite simple, Mr. Speaker. We want to improve the Anglophone education system. It is not a mystery. We have a system of streaming in place that disadvantages the majority of our students. We are implementing a system that has been proven in Ontario to work and to attain a high level of French that is going to allow all our students—all our students—to learn, at the minimum, conversational French and to have enrichment opportunities to grow their level of French. You know, this is something that the opposition should be supporting wholeheartedly. We want to help our children in the Anglophone school system.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): The time for question period has expired—the last one.