

May 9, 2019

[Translation]

Postsecondary Education

Mr. D. Landry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are seriously concerned that a significant number of New Brunswick students will no longer be able to afford to attend university or college. We are particularly worried about the fate of New Brunswickers from low- and middle-income families.

The government abandoned the Free Tuition Program, a decision that was widely criticized. Furthermore, tuition fees are increasing significantly. The University of New Brunswick has just announced a tuition increase of up to 25%. There have also been significant cuts to a program providing summer jobs for students. Does the Premier realize that it is getting harder and harder for low- and middle-income students to attend university or college?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, we made it very clear up front that there were a whole bunch of New Brunswick students who were attending private universities and who were being left behind by the previous government. There are a far greater number of students who now have access to the up-front bursary money. We also made it very clear that we were going to leave that up-front bursary money in place until we had seen a full cohort go through so that we could measure it and determine its effectiveness. That is exactly what we have committed to, and that is exactly what we have done.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I am going to quote Renée Arseneau, a University of New Brunswick nursing student. In a recent CBC news story, Ms. Arseneau stated that she would not have attended university without the Free Tuition Program. This is what she said:

[Original]

“This was one of the reasons that I stayed in New Brunswick and was planning to stay in New Brunswick...

Now it’s like, what’s the point? Why would I stay?”



[Translation]

Here is someone who wants to be a nurse in New Brunswick, but she is now wondering what the point is, since you cancelled the Free Tuition Program. Mr. Premier, what will you say to Ms. Arseneau?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have to stop this fearmongering. There is all kinds of up-front bursary money still in place in New Brunswick, both federal and provincial. The difference now is that there are hundreds more students across this province who have access to it and who had been left behind by the previous government.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to monitor the effectiveness of all the programs in place, but we on this side of the House are proud that we made sure it was fair to all students. We do not believe that it was fair that one student could go to CCNB to be a paramedic and get up-front bursary money and someone who went to Oulton College did not get access to it. It is that simple. This has been about fairness, and there are far more students who get up-front bursary money now than there were under you.

Mr. D. Landry: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would answer this: not the poor.

[Translation]

One student at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John campus, Brady Rimes, went back to school thanks to the Free Tuition Program. This is what he said:

[Original]

I cried actually, to tell you the truth... I just thought that the way the provincial government has handled this situation is very unprofessional.

[Translation]

I understand why you want to reinstate the tuition tax back credit. It is good for high-income New Brunswickers. If this is why you are doing it, so much the better for them. However, Mr. Premier, would you like to reconsider the terrible decision you made regarding free tuition, which is why some students are considering dropping out of school or, worse, leaving the province?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the members opposite are spreading misinformation. There were 48 000 New Brunswickers who took advantage of the Tuition Tax



Credit when it was in place previously, and, out of those, 87% were students with a combined family income of below \$50 000. So this argument that it helps only the well-off is simply not true, Mr. Speaker. They need to get their facts straight.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I will ask our minister what he thinks of the current situation. In my riding, there is one family with five children. The father and mother are on income assistance. The eldest child went to university thanks to the Free Tuition Program. This winter, at Christmas, I met this family, and this girl's sister asked me if she would be able to benefit from the same program to attend university. This is how I answered her: Certainly, since I hope the government will not change the programs we put in place.

Mr. Speaker, what would you answer this girl, the second child in a family of five children, whose parents are both on income assistance and have two of their five children wanting to attend university? Now, they see that the government might pull the rug from under their feet and that they will not have the opportunity to attend university.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, this has to stop. I mean, the members opposite are creating this whole idea that all these students are not going to be able to go to university next year. There is all kinds of up-front bursary money in place now. Those students can apply for that funding. The only difference is that there are hundreds more low-income New Brunswick students who have access to this bursary money now, but did not when the members opposite put the program in place, Mr. Speaker. This is misinformation around the Tuition Tax Credit, as I explained a minute ago. They stole that tax credit from New Brunswickers, and I am proud that we gave it back. It is retroactive for two years, and they have got it going forward as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to come and explain this to children in the northern regions who will not be able to attend university or college because the government eliminated this program. Thank you.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Holder: With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, I have explained it. There is all kinds of up-front bursary money in place, both federal and provincial, and we have brought the Tuition Tax Credit back as well. Furthermore—furthermore—our review is not done. We are going to continue to work with student groups. We are going to work with both public and private universities, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)



Hon. Mr. Holder: I am sorry. I do not remember interrupting any of you when I was speaking.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, there is all kinds of programming in place. We are going to continue to review what is in place, and we are going to build on what we have got. But, at the end of the day, we brought in a program that is fair to all New Brunswick students, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I will admit this to you: I have been in politics for over 20 years, and I have made announcements worth more than \$500 million. However, I can tell you that when Brian Gallant, the Premier at the time, announced the Free Tuition Program, it was the best announcement in which I took part in the House.

I can tell you one more thing: Students saw hope in this program. Some people back home felt that getting an education meant going into debt, while, with the Free Tuition Program, they saw an opportunity to attend college or university. Now, students feel they have lost the right to attend college or university.

I would like the minister to come to the Acadian Peninsula and explain to us the various things he can provide to these students.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Holder: I will go to any corner of this province at any time to explain what we are doing on this side of the House, at any time. At the end of the day, we are trying to build a host of programs that are fair to all New Brunswickers. The members opposite left people behind with their programs.

Do you want to talk about it being a great day? We got all kinds of phone calls from students who were attending private universities and who felt left behind. We also got 14 000 signatures on a petition from students who were angry that they did not have their tuition tax cash back credit still there. The members opposite took that from the students of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition needs to work with us to build a system of programming that does not leave people behind and that makes sure that every New Brunswicker has an opportunity to go to university. Those members had a program that left many students behind.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Mr. Horsman: Mr. Speaker, students who received free tuition at St. Thomas—these are facts—account for 30% of the student body. At UNB, it is 22%, and at Mount A, 17%. It is about increasing access. To quote Caitlin Grogan from the UNBSJ student council, “Tax credits don’t help students get through the door.” I agree with her. You have a big slush fund, and you have gone back on bad decisions a few times. The public is also saying that the biggest wall for students is access to postsecondary education. Will the minister admit that he has made a terrible mistake by eliminating this program? Will he do the right thing for thousands of students in this province who benefit from free tuition?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many more times I can say it. There is still all kinds of up-front bursary money in play, plus the tax credit. I know the members opposite do not like tax credits. I know they think New Brunswickers do not pay enough taxes. We certainly heard that from the new Leader of the Liberal Party yesterday when he said that we need a carbon tax and we need it now. We know that there has never been a tax they did not like.

Mr. Speaker, there is all kinds of up-front bursary money in place. They keep spreading this notion that students are being left behind, and that is not the case. Students were left behind when the members opposite built a program that did not apply to all New Brunswick students.

[Translation]

Ms. Thériault: In terms of postsecondary education for Francophone New Brunswickers, here are a few statistics about the Université de Moncton: At the Moncton campus, 28% of students benefited from the Free Tuition Program; at the Edmundston campus, it was 44%, and, at the Shippagan campus, it was 51% of students, which means one in two students; that is huge.

Once again, those who are hardest hit by these cuts from the Conservative government are the northern New Brunswick Francophones. On the other side of the House, who is standing up for New Brunswick Francophones? Who speaks up for Francophones?

This is just the Free Tuition Program, without even getting into Tuition Relief for the Middle Class or CCNB statistics.

So, here is my question for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour: Since he said he went everywhere in the province, did he come to Caraquet, Shippagan, or Tracadie? Did he measure the impacts of his decision to eliminate the Free Tuition Program?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite can play these divisive politics all they want. The reality is that we are building programs that affect and help all New Brunswickers. What about all the students, as I said a few minutes ago, that were training to be paramedics at Oulton College that were left behind by the previous administration’s plan? What about the students who were going to Crandall to be teachers and who did not have access to a bursary



program under the previous government? We built a program that applies in every corner of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Student Employment

Mr. G. Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, the province's SEED program helps provide summer jobs for many students in this province. This is a great program for students. It helps them pay their bills for university and college. During estimates, we discovered that this government is making huge cuts to the program, slashing it in the neighbourhood of 50%. Can the minister inform this House how many fewer jobs will be available under this program compared to last year for students who are looking for ways to offset the costs of their education?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have done with the funding for the SEED program is bring it back down to the historic level that existed two years ago, prior to the previous election. What we saw with the previous government was that it was trying to buy New Brunswickers back with their own money and it was spending money left, right, and centre. We brought the SEED funding back to the level where it had been. We feel very strongly that it is adequate. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, 80% of the students that we interviewed last year actually found student employment outside of the SEED program, even with all the money that the previous government threw at it, because the reality is that there are all kinds of opportunities in the private sector right now.

Mr. G. Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, some historical levels: 7 145 students applied for the SEED program, and the government handed out 2 500 vouchers for 1 400 positions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, this program has been very beneficial, not only for students, but also for nonprofit organizations throughout the province, which depend on these funds to hire students who help them do the good work they do in New Brunswick communities. Has the minister considered the impact on nonprofit organizations in the province, which depend on this program to hire students in the summer?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, we feel very strongly about supporting the nonprofits, and there is all kinds of funding in place for the nonprofit organizations. There are special programs outside of the SEED program that are for county museums, for instance, and for historic sites, and for the libraries. Those are all very much still in place.

The members opposite were the ones that changed, quite frankly, the way that the SEED program originally worked, when MLAs could have input. MLAs understood their communities and could have some input and make recommendations to the minister in terms of what some of those nonprofit organizations could receive for SEED funding. We left the program in place as



the members opposite had implemented it so that we can monitor it for another year, but we are committed to making sure that the SEED program works going forward. We on this side of the House, quite frankly, still have some concerns, Mr. Speaker, on the way that they implemented the program in the first place.

Mr. G. Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, what is the attack on students for? When you start looking at this government, you see that it has been attacking students from day one, since it got in power: Free Tuition Program, cancelled; Tuition Relief for the Middle Class, cancelled; Timely Completion Benefit, cancelled; interest forgiveness, cancelled. The number of available SEED vouchers was reduced by about half. The number of weeks worked under SEED was reduced. Accessibility and affordability to postsecondary education is more difficult. It is gone. Students need a government that cares. I ask the minister this through you, Mr. Speaker: What is the message? What is the hope for students in this province for postsecondary education?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what the hope is for students in this province. It is having a government that takes action. We on this side of the House have our fiscal house in order.

Some 80% of the students that got jobs last year found jobs outside of the SEED program, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that we have an adequate number of SEED placements in place. But they threw money at it. They kept throwing money at it. I will tell you something. We cannot keep borrowing money that we do not have. We cannot keep paying our Sears card with our Eaton's card. We all know they paid their Sears card off with our card, quite frankly—the taxpayers' card.

The students that I am talking to, Mr. Speaker...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Holder: The students that I am talking to are happy that we are getting our fiscal house in order and that we are not spending \$2 million per day on interest on the debt.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Holder: We are applying it and spending it on the priorities of New Brunswickers.

Climate Change

Ms. Mitton: Mr. Speaker, in the 2018 report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and in this week's landmark UN study, which is being called the



Report on Extinction, scientists have stated that we must transform our economies and societies in order for humanity and a million other species to survive. The science is clear, but what we need to do is to make big changes immediately.

The Premier has stated that climate change is real and is caused by humans. The Premier has rightly acknowledged that climate breakdown is impacting New Brunswickers in significant ways. I know that we will not stop using fossil fuels tomorrow. However, I also know that physics demands that we quickly and significantly reduce the amount that we are using. The science is telling us not to invest in new fossil fuel infrastructure. Does the Premier agree that we need to halt the creation of all new fossil fuel infrastructure, in line with the science and recommendations urgently presented by the experts?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, you know, the opportunity that we have here is to be a transition economy, not one that cuts off all economic development and hopes for the best, but one that transfers over time. When we talk about development and we talk about having jobs and we talk about having a future, somebody has to pay for all of that. Otherwise, things change dramatically, and people cannot live and work. Equally, we cannot be the only ones on the docket here. We are dealing with competitors all around, most notably to the south.

It is interesting that some of the conditions that have been improved in the south—and we are talking about the United States—have been related to its shale gas development. It has backed away from the heavy oil industry and coal-fired generation because of shale gas development. That has been a major achievement for the United States, to be able to move forward with climate change activities and to reduce emissions.

But here, Mr. Speaker, we hope we can just say: We are not doing anything, but people will still work, live, and invest here. We know that private sector investment has gone down dramatically in Canada and in New Brunswick and private sector investment is going to help our future. We need to be a transition economy, not a shut-off economy, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Mitton: Mr. Speaker, economic development is not equal to fossil fuel development, and it is unfortunate that the Premier is not willing to take the urgent recommendations of scientists and experts. However, he is not alone. It is difficult for us to process these studies and to accept that we are part of a system that is threatening life on Earth. The good news is that we have a long list of solutions and just enough time to avoid the very worst consequences of climate breakdown, but we need to understand and accept the scale of the crisis in order to mount the appropriate response.

The United Kingdom, the world's fifth-largest economy, was the first country to declare an environment and climate emergency last week. There are 28 municipalities across Canada, including Edmundston, Moncton, and Saint John, that have also declared climate emergencies. When asked by the media "Do you think climate is an emergency in New Brunswick right now?", New Brunswick's Minister of Public Safety said: Oh, yes, I do. Mr. Speaker, my question



to the Premier is this: Do you agree with the Minister of Public Safety that we have a climate emergency?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. What I agree with is that we have seen climate change activity that has ramped up in the last number of years. I do not think anyone is going to deny that. The impact is from how quickly that has ramped up based on human activity and how quickly that has ramped up based on global change. We know that we can all do our part, and we are doing our part.

We have a carbon plan—a carbon plan that reflects the taxation on emissions through an output-based costing model. Mr. Speaker, this plan will cost industry about \$14 million more per year in our province. That plan has been put forward to the federal government. It has not been accepted yet. The same type of plan has been accepted from other provinces, but not from New Brunswick. You have to wonder why we are being disadvantaged here in New Brunswick. That is a bit of a concern.

But regarding this \$14 million, do you know what it is? It is industry paying for innovation to help us design the future, not shut the future off, but have a plan going forward. Let's let industry, through the fact that we are charging industry for the emissions that it is putting out... Let's put that money into real innovation, real results, so we will end up having a cleaner environment for the long term.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Organ Donation

Mrs. Conroy: Mr. Speaker, no family who is dealing with the loss of a loved one should be faced with the added heartache of being told that their wishes to donate their family member's organs cannot be fulfilled. That is what Michelle and Tyson Astle had to go through immediately following the passing of their 16-year-old son. They wanted to donate his beautiful blue eyes so that another person could see through them. That did not happen because there was no medical specialist available anywhere in the province—in the province. This is happening in a province where we are asking people to sign donor cards and during National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister of Health this: Can something be done immediately to ensure that these gaps in the system are fixed so that no other family is forced to experience what the Astle family has?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Mr. Speaker, I have compassion and sympathy for the family. It is unfortunate and terrible that this tragedy occurred in our province. It did occur late at night on a Saturday between a Good Friday holiday and an Easter Sunday holiday. Sometimes, things like this unfortunately and regrettably happen. I would hope that no one in this House would consider this a political issue. It is a tragedy. I have sympathy and compassion for the family.



Sometimes in situations like this, the opportunity to give organ donations is a great gift that comes out of a tragedy. I certainly will work hard to try to see that it is improved.

Mrs. Conroy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. The decision to donate one's organs and tissue at the time of death is a selfless act, and it is one that benefits many others. People who need organ donation must wait until a match is available.

Currently, the organ donation program in this province relies on people stating their intention to be donors as part of their driver's licence or Medicare card. Nova Scotia recently announced that it would bring in legislation that would automatically consider everyone to be an organ donor, unless people decide to opt out. The minister has stated that his department is studying the issue. Can the minister please tell us what is happening with this file?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Again, Mr. Speaker, organ donation does flow from a terrible and regrettable tragedy. It is an opportunity for people to have some sense of comfort that a terrible loss and a terrible tragedy was able to help another person. So, certainly, we are going to look at this. Again, I do not know that it is a political issue at all. It is an issue of compassion. It is an issue of appropriate behaviour, in my judgment.

We dealt with this a little earlier. I have had the department look at various other provinces, various other places where this is being done. Hopefully, we will be able to do something positive and constructive that transcends politics. It has no basis politically, in my judgment, in this House. It is something that we all can be in favour of and can stand behind to help our fellow man in times of tragedy.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

French Immersion

Mr. C. Chiasson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member for Portland-Simonds sure made his contribution to global warming today.

It would seem, Mr. Speaker, that somebody had a premonition of the question that I was going to ask today and decided to issue a press release and give me the answer in advance. I thank him for that. I went out on my noon hour, and I thought I would buy him a little gift in appreciation. I looked for a pair of blue flip-flops, Mr. Speaker, and they were sold out. They had had dozens of pairs, but they were sold out.

After reading the news release put out by the Minister of Education, I am really pleased to see that for this year, for September 2019, French immersion will be remaining at the Grade 1 entry point. Can the minister please confirm how long he intends to leave it at the Grade 1 entry point? Will he be putting it to another entry point next year or the year after, or will he be...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.



Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite, thank you very much for that question. Summer is indeed coming. I always need appropriate footwear, so I certainly appreciate that offer.

To answer your question...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Can you hear me now? Is that okay? Sorry about that.

The answer to your question is that, unlike other parties that have sometimes sat on this side of the House, this government does not intend to make promises that it cannot keep around mandates that we do not have. I have a mandate to be the Minister of Education today and for as long as the members of this House and the people of this province decide.

We are going to make it very clear that we are engaging in, as I did this morning, a broad education reform plan. I welcome the input from Minister... From Mr. Chiasson... Sorry, excuse me. I retract that immediately. From the honourable member opposite, for his input. During the estimates process, the honourable member contributed various ideas that helped me to make the decision that was made around the entry point, so let's keep that up. Let's keep on cooperating across all sides of this House to deliver a world-class education—top 10 in the world. We can do it. We need all hands on deck. I hope that I can count on the member opposite.

Mr. C. Chiasson: The minister says that he cannot commit to any mandate past whatever time period he is talking about, yet he is the same minister who said that the government agrees with the 10-year education plan. I am not sure why the minister does not feel that French immersion is not part of the 10-year education plan and why he feels that he cannot commit to keeping the French immersion entry point at Grade 1 for the span of the 10-year education plan. Can the minister please clarify this? Is it for September only, or will we be looking at another movement next year?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: One of the things that I always find very important in any new job that I undertake is doing the background reading first. It is ironic that we are here today having a discussion around an education plan that this government has been happy to endorse and build on and that this government looks forward to improving on through changes to our education system that will make us a world-class system.

What is odd and interesting is that the member opposite, the member responsible for education for the opposition caucus, is unaware of the fact that French immersion is not in the 10-year education plan. If there is this level of basic misinformation around the basics of the education plan, which are referred to specifically in the Auditor General's report as being outside that scope... This is the sort of problem that New Brunswickers end up having with



politics, when we have discussions that are based on bleating and yelling and we do not have discussions based on facts and reality.

So let's get back to talking about reality, back to answering real questions. I am happy to ask them, but I need some better material from the members opposite. I need a better straight man, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

