

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Bilingualism.

This is a topic New Brunswickers talk a lot about. And a topic they've talked a lot about lately.

Bilingualism is a positive contributor to our social fabric. But bilingualism is also a positive contributor to our economy.

This is what I would like to talk to you about today. Many of you may be expecting a speech on the economy. And I will address how much bilingualism is a cornerstone of our economy. But it is important to talk about bilingualism in and of itself.

I have heard many people say that there seems to be more linguistic tension in New Brunswick than normal. But I think it is important to remember that there have always been linguistic tensions below the surface. To be frank, there have been other tensions as well.

There have been regional tensions. Urban and rural tensions. Northern and southern tensions.

And tensions between supporters of le Titan, the Wildcats and the Seadogs.

Why is there more tension now than before?

I think we all know that social media plays a part in this. It is a megaphone and an echo chamber. Nowadays those on all sides of an issue have a platform to express their views. And they can express their views to hundreds who share those views. People they might never have found before. And it seems those who might be a bit more radical have an opportunity to disproportionately influence the dialogue. It means debates catch fire more often. And tensions rise to the surface more easily.

As a government, we've put New Brunswick on track to balance the books by 2020. That took some tough decisions in our first two budgets. There's no doubt that in any place when tough decisions are being made, tensions can spark. When people feel services in their area are threatened, they can react by pointing to other groups or other regions whose services might be cut instead. And add to that, from 2006 to 2014 we went through a prolonged economic downturn. That can't help. But these challenges are not unique to New Brunswick. So we should not be looking for a scapegoat that's unique to New Brunswick.

So let's talk about bilingualism.

Under the Official Languages Act passed by Richard Hatfield, it's the Premier who is by law responsible for quote "ensuring respect" for the two official languages of New Brunswick. It is with this role in mind that I speak to you today. I want you to know that I will also be doing this with the people of Caraquet and the Acadian Peninsula on Wednesday.

And I am speaking to you today from a written text. Those of you who have seen me speak before will know that this is not the norm for me. But I am doing this because I want to be sure that I deliver the same message to the people of Saint John today that I will deliver to the people of Caraquet the day after tomorrow.

I will be delivering the same speech in both linguistic communities. I will be delivering the same speech to all New Brunswickers.

So please keep in mind throughout the speech that everything I say to you today, I will say in Caraquet on Wednesday.

Before we get started I think it's important to recognize some of the challenges that we have faced. We understand that Acadians and francophones in New Brunswick have had a trialed past.

After building a society in this region for generations from 1604 to 1755, the Acadian people were forcibly removed from their lands. They were separated from their families. They were shipped to different corners of the world. This was done by a rogue governor acting without authority from his superiors. But things moved slowly in the 1700s and it was eight years later before the order for the great expulsion was rescinded. By then, many Acadian lands had been taken over by other settlers. Some Acadians returned and some did not. In some cases it took multiple generations for Acadian families to be reunited. And in all cases they had to start from scratch.

A few decades later, after the loyalists came and New Brunswick had become a province, Acadians struggled to earn the right to vote. It wasn't until 1810 that Acadians could vote without having to swear an oath counter to their cultural and religious values.

You have to go a century and a half further to the 1960s before francophones were able to attend public schools and universities in their own language in this province.

Acadians certainly went through trials and tribulations over many centuries. And it took generations to repair and improve the quality of life for a people who went through such turmoil.

It wasn't until 1963 that Acadians got their own university; the Université de Moncton. Before that date, they had three choices: Don't go to university at all. Go to Quebec to study. Or study in their second language.

Compare this to UNB which is one of the oldest public universities on the continent. And thank goodness we had it in this province. But we've been providing an English university education in this province for the last 230 years. For francophones, it has only been 50 years.

A formal system of publicly funded francophone schools was only established in New Brunswick in the late 1960s.

But our province has worked very hard in the last half century to create official bilingualism and equality of our two founding cultures. It is thanks to visionary leaders like Louis Robichaud who gave us equal opportunity. Richard Hatifeld who gave us official bilingualism. And Frank McKenna who worked with Ottawa to have our bilingual status enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Since 1993, our bilingualism has been written into the highest law in the land. The constitution. So this debate should pretty much stop there. These rights are enshrined in a very important document that I don't think will change anytime soon.

But we do believe it is important to make things work. We need to have mutual respect. And that means being willing to have an open and frank conversation. And that's what we hope to start today.

In New Brunswick, we have given English and French speaking people the right to be served in the language of their choice by their government. We have given them the right to be educated

in their first language. We have given both English and French communities the right to preserve their language and their culture.

Any group across the world would want to have these rights. It is the right thing to do, but that doesn't always mean it's easy.

My mother is an anglophone who has struggled to learn French her whole life. I started school in English and grew up speaking English at home. I was 10 before I really started to become functionally bilingual. So I get it. I understand how tough it can be.

I understand that many Anglophones feel that francophone rights have had an impact on them. And that they feel that it hasn't been a positive impact.

Some feel it's more difficult to get a job. Some feel they haven't been given a fair chance to become bilingual. Some don't understand why certain francophone institutions exist.

I also understand that when Anglophones try to speak French, they struggle. If there is a group of 10 francophones and 1 Anglophone, everyone ends up speaking English. This often happens even if the Anglophone is trying to speak French. Many Anglophones have told me they find it frustrating because they actually want to practice their French, but they aren't given the chance. Just so you know though, francophones are trying to be nice. They think to themselves, "hey, we can all speak English and you're an Anglophone so let's switch to your language."

I get it that this makes it really tough for anglophones. It is a lot easier for a francophone surrounded by English to learn a second language. Anglophones who really want to try to learn French often have little chance to practice. And well intentioned francophones make it harder for them when they won't speak French with them. This hurts francophones too. It is a self-defeating phenomenon. I will come back to this phenomenon a few times today. And I will do that because it is so important to understand why it is a lot harder for francophones to learn and keep their French language when surrounded by English.

If you will permit me though, I would like to talk a bit more about my family's experience with bilingualism.

My father is a francophone and my mother is an Anglophone. My mother is a Scholten from the Netherlands, my father a Gallant from Shediac Bridge. My brother, sister, and I are bilingual. We grew up speaking English at home, but we went mostly to French schools. So I saw and lived many situations that hundreds, if not thousands, of New Brunswickers live every day.

It was actually my mother who wanted us to be bilingual. It wasn't my francophone father who wanted us to learn French, it was my anglophone mother.

I'm guessing it was because she was visionary. She knew of the many benefits if we were bilingual. But I think she knew this because she knew what it was like to grow up and not be able to speak that second language.

So when many New Brunswickers tell me that there aren't enough opportunities for Anglophones to learn French in New Brunswick. I get it.

Later this week you will see us make announcements to try to begin to fix this. Announcements about enhancements for adult second language training. And enhancements to French immersion, ensuring it is done the right way. And that it is as accessible as possible in rural New Brunswick.

In our family, so we could be bilingual, our mother wanted to send us to French schools.

Both my older brother and older sister went to French schools from day one. They hadn't learned French at home but within months at kindergarten they were able to speak French with no problems.

I had a different experience. When my mother signed me up for school, the francophone kindergarten teacher told my mother that if I didn't speak French already I had no business being there. And if I didn't understand what was going on that would be my problem and she wouldn't help me. That is unfortunate. And it is stories like this that I am sure cause a lot of the frustration among anglophones. It certainly frustrated my mother who enrolled me in the English school instead. So in grade one, I began French immersion like many anglophones and started to learn some French.

I will tell you about another experience I had that speaks to how linguistic tensions can form. I was 7 or 8 years old, and I was calling my mom from the payphone at school. I was speaking in English, because my mom couldn't speak French. My immersion teacher came up to me and told me to stop speaking English. I said, "well my mother doesn't understand French" but she said "no, you're in French immersion so you have to speak French." She kept pushing me and pushing me as I was talking to my mom. And she kept cutting me off saying I have to speak French to the point that I just hung up on my mother. At the age of 7 or 8 years old I didn't really know how to handle it.

Looking back that was obviously not reasonable. Yes in immersion, students ideally should speak French at all times to get the experience. But we do not live in a world that is black and white. We need to protect the minority language, but we have to be pragmatic about it. When a child can't tell his mother what time to pick him up from school, it plants a seed of tension in both of them.

Later in grade five, I started to go to French school. I will never forget my first test at the French school. It was geography. I got a 9 out of 10. And that's not a bad score, but I was really upset. I kept looking at the answer that had been marked wrong and I knew I was right. The question was "what is the largest city in New Brunswick?" And I wrote "Saint John." I went to my teacher and said, in French, "I'm pretty sure it is Saint John" and he said "no, it is 'Saint-Jean.'"

Things like this don't help build tolerance.

Francophones talk a lot about their institutions. And they are very protective of them. Institutions are important.

The Université de Moncton. If it wasn't there I would not have studied in French. I probably would not have fully understood the challenges facing francophones. And I wouldn't understand my Acadian culture, there is no doubt about that.

And also I've seen anglophones talk about francophone institutions. For example my uncle on my mother's side thought it was unfair to have the Jeux de l'acadie be only for francophones.

He didn't understand why my siblings and I would be able to go to the Jeux de l'Acadie, but that his kids would not be able to go.

The Jeux de l'Acadie is a sporting event that's about a lot more than sports. It is a celebration of Acadian culture and the French language. It is important for minorities to have these types of celebrations.

Sometimes we get into debates where reasonable people from the two linguistic groups come to completely different conclusions. And they cannot understand where the other is coming from.

The school busing issue comes to mind. This is not a new issue. What is new is that it is such a lively debate. For 50 years, schools have been administered by English and French public school districts. Each district administers its own schools and its own school buses. By default, we have had English buses and French buses all of this time. Many in the francophone community, including legal scholars, believe that this is a constitutional right. Many in the anglophone community believe that this doesn't make common sense. The reality is that this has been happening for decades and that the duplication is minimal. In many regions, there are only schools in one language. When there are schools from both languages, the buses are often travelling in separate directions. Or both sets of buses are full.

This obviously is not coming at great cost to taxpayers. According to a report by the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, New Brunswick spends 58.7 million dollars on school busing, while Nova Scotia spends 71.2 million. On a per student basis, that's 572 dollars per student in New Brunswick; while Nova Scotia spends 592 dollars per student. That's right, New Brunswick's school bus expense is 3% lower than Nova Scotia's on a per student basis!

Yet many focused on this issue in order to spark tensions. Of course, they didn't cite the real facts.

Nonetheless, we have asked the Court of Appeal of New Brunswick to clarify some things for us all. Is there an absolute right to distinct buses alongside a distinct school system? Or is there not? Or is there some middle ground? Those are fair questions and that's why we've asked the highest court in the province to answer them.

My parents went through tough times as they worked at grocery stores and fast food restaurants their whole lives. When I was about 10 years old, we moved to Grande-Digue from Moncton when my father had lost his job. We moved in with my grandparents in a little house that seven people would share. We would share rooms and turned the dining room into a bedroom so my grandparents could sleep in it. When I moved there my mother gave me a choice. I could either go to the English school or the French school. It was pretty interesting that my mother gave me that responsibility. My mother always taught us to take our choices seriously and to take responsibility for our decisions. But that's a whole other theme, for another speech, for another day. She did tell me that it was my choice and at the age of 10 and I decided to go to the French school.

Why did I make that choice? Was it because at the age of 10, I knew I would become more effectively bilingual in a French school? No, it was because I had seen my older brother and sister go to the Jeux de l'Acadie. And I wanted to be able to go too. So I can tell you first hand that I know the importance of these types of institutions. They played a significant role in my linguistic development and my cultural development.

I've had the chance to go to a few of these institutions. I played in the Jeux de l'Acadie. I went to the Louis-J-Robichaud High School, which opened in 1969. It was the first francophone public high school built by the province under the equal opportunity program.

I then went on to Université de Moncton where I really advanced my French vocabulary and understood the challenges facing francophones. And of course I came to understand more of my Acadian culture.

These kinds of institutions for minorities are crucial. If you were told you had to go to school in your second language, with no supports to maintain and grow your first language skills, how good would your first language be? What if you were surrounded everywhere by your second language? Maybe you would give up on your first language.

The Université de Moncton in my opinion is the most important institution for francophones and Acadians. Providing post-secondary education opportunities for a people is the best way to ensure their economic success. But it also ensures that they have a strong social fabric and that they can build their identity as a people. Université de Moncton has been playing that role beautifully, but it is important to note again that it has only been doing it since 1963.

I want to talk about some of the challenges my mother has faced as an anglophone in the workforce in Greater Moncton.

She has worked in the fast food industry her whole life. She is currently the manager of a McDonald's. It's a place where she's learned you can never please everybody. Especially when it comes to language. One time, she had perfectly bilingual menus, where the French is listed before the English. She was yelled at countless times by anglophones because of this. Some francophones haven't shown her much tolerance either. She once posted a congratulatory message for high school graduates on the front sign in English only. The francophones were not happy! She tries to speak to francophones in French and she's been screamed at because her French isn't good enough.

Why do we do this to each other?

The sign is bilingual, does it really matter which order the languages are in?

The message to the graduates came from the heart, isn't it the thought that counts?

Someone is trying their best to address you in your language even though it is tough for her, shouldn't we say "thank you"?

We all need to be tolerant.

I talked before about how we discourage anglophones from speaking French. And frankly how we discourage francophones from speaking French.

I know that some Anglophones who know French are afraid to speak it. They don't want to make a mistake or to be embarrassed. They're afraid that their French isn't good enough.

I think it's important to note that that is how almost every francophone feels when they're speaking their second language.

There are Anglophones that try to speak French to francophones, but the francophone won't speak back in French. They may be trying to be nice. But the result is that the anglophone never masters French. And maybe they just give up. And the francophone loses an opportunity to keep their own language skills fresh.

This is a very real phenomenon. I don't know how to explain it, but it happens time and time again. And I can tell you that I've seen it at every school I've ever gone to and every hockey team I've ever played on. I've seen it in almost every social setting that you can imagine.

When there's one Anglophone in a group of francophones, the group will speak English.

This is why anglophones wanting to learn French are so desperate for quote "bilingual" institutions where they can practice French. But this is also why for francophones when somebody calls something "bilingual" they often think that practically this will mean that almost everyone is going to speak English. If its Anglophones and francophones in the same school system or in the same school, everyone is going to speak English. Now this is why francophones have a legitimate worry. They worry that if Anglophones go into the French schools and into the francophone daycares their youth will all speak English. And they're right to think that because it happens everywhere.

Again, another very real example of this: my roommate at Université de Moncton Law School was an Anglophone from Fredericton. He spoke French very well but it was obviously his second language. Every time he was around all the UdeM law students would speak English, and the second he was gone we would speak French.

My nephew Jeremy and my niece Cassandra are bilingual, but they are francophones first. They went to francophone daycares and francophone schools. My other niece Annabelle, their younger sister went to a "bilingual" daycare where they clearly spoke more English. I remember I asked her once "es-tu francophone ou Anglophone?" and she responded "I'm French." She wasn't as comfortable to speak in French as her siblings. This is another example that if you have just a few Anglophones in a huge group of francophones, English will be the language that is predominately used.

Studies show the best way for a francophone to be bilingual in a place like Moncton, Saint John or Fredericton is to speak nothing but French at home and school. English comes easy because you will be immersed and surrounded by it for the rest of the day. On television, social media, at the movies, on the radio, at your sports practice or music class: it is almost always English that is spoken.

That's why it's important to francophones that there be two education systems. That's why many argue the importance of having separate anglophone and francophone daycares.

Also I think francophones discourage other francophones from using French. Just like anglophones get criticized for not speaking French well enough. Francophones do this to each other.

There was an interesting study done a while back that looked at what students wrote on the back of the grad photos they gave to their friends. In the francophone high schools in the southeast, most kids wrote the messages in English. I pulled out my photos and sure enough it was true. Most of the messages were in English. In really poor English though. With all kinds of spelling and grammar mistakes. I thought about that a lot, and I think I know why it happens. If a francophone wrote bad English, that would be accepted. I mean, it is their second language

after all. If a francophone wrote bad French, they would aggressively criticized by their francophone teachers.

So we have a perverse effect happening because we are so strict about how people write and speak French they actually become afraid to use French. And if they never practice their French they never improve.

I'll give you a personal example of how critical francophones can be of each other at times. Do you know what subject of the first story on Radio-Canada about me when I won the leadership of the Liberal Party was? It was not about my education or my experience. It was not my family's economic story. It was to criticize my French accent. It is a struggle at times to not slip into chiac and say "j'ai driver mon char et j'ai parker au mall." But I try hard. And what does it say that this was the most newsworthy story about the new Liberal leader?

I can tell you I understand the importance of ensuring peoples' rights, the importance of the building a sense of identity for both linguistic communities to be able to celebrate their language and their culture. I understand the importance of ensuring that we do this in a pragmatic way. And that we make sure the quality of life for all will be advanced.

There are some things that we need to do. As individuals we need to be tolerant. I have seen many times people unfortunately not being as tolerant as we would all like. And it has had a direct impact on my family and people that I love. And I think that this lack of tolerance and pragmatism explains some, if not a lot of the tension.

But there are also a lot of misunderstandings, myths and exaggerations that need to be debunked.

Anglophones complain that we spend more per capita on the French education system than on the English. We do spend a bit more but that is normal. The French system is the smaller system, so there aren't as good economies of scale. And there are special costs for the minority language; textbooks aren't as widely produced and they cost more money. And probably the most important factor is that francophones and French schools are more predominantly in rural New Brunswick. The fact is the two school districts where we spend the most per capita are the two most rural districts, one English and one French.

Anglophones are concerned about finding jobs. But there are 3,000 jobs on nbjobs.ca right now. And most of them only require you to speak English. As for government jobs, the majority – about 55% – require only an understanding of English. Meaning that 55% of the jobs can be filled by anglophones who don't speak French. Though they could also be filled by bilingual people with English skills.

And there are jobs for anglophones that have been created by bilingualism.

Think of our contact centre industry. That's 18,000 jobs. Yes many of them are bilingual; but many of them are English-only. But if we weren't a bilingual province, none of these jobs would exist. And EVEN IF every one of those jobs required bilingualism, this is a 1.4 billion dollar industry. And they create spinoffs in other industries where unilingual anglophones can work. Those 18,000 people are buying homes and spending in the economy which creates more jobs for engineers and architects and welders and carpenters and cashiers and waiters and cooks that speak whatever language.

In the civil service, there actually aren't any bilingual jobs. Each team of employees has to have a certain level of bilingual capacity based on the roles they play. With a few exceptions, there is room for unilingual anglophones on every team. In fact, as I mentioned, the majority of the positions require English only. A particular job is posted as bilingual if there aren't enough bilingual people on the team. The very same job might be posted later as English-only if other bilingual members have joined the team.

In a place like Saint John, most government jobs don't require French, but some have to in order to provide a level of service. But there are also provincial services in Saint John. We hear a lot of complaints that many jobs at the New Brunswick Heart Centre require bilingualism. But what you have there is an incredible centre of excellence. It serves the entire province. And that means that 1 out of every 3 customers is francophone. If you take your loved one for heart surgery, that is a tough experience. And when you are trying to find your way to the right wing of the hospital, I would imagine you would need someone who can give you directions in your own language? I would imagine when the surgeon comes out you would want to hear the prognosis in your own language? Many anglophones get sent to the Dumont hospital in Moncton for cancer treatment. And we ensure that they can be served in English because that is their right. We owe francophones the same right when they come to Saint John for heart surgery.

We also have to start being pragmatic when it comes to ensuring people's rights. To say that everybody in the senior leadership of the civil service needs to be bilingual IS NOT FAIR given that we have not yet offered a generation of Anglophones a fair chance to become bilingual through accessible second language training opportunities that work.

We need to offer second language training, proper French immersion, and access to it in rural New Brunswick so that for the next generation this will not be an issue.

So why am I telling all of you this? It is because we need your help.

You are leaders in your communities. We need you to help to spread some of the positivity. And there is lots that is positive. There are economic benefits that are very tangible. And there are economic benefits that are intangible because of doors our bilingualism opens to the francophone world.

As an example, we will host about 3,000 athletes from around the world in 2021 for les jeux de la Francophonie. It is the equivalent of hosting the Pan-Am Games. This will create spinoffs of countless jobs and investments. And it is a remarkable way for our people to be able to participate in a world class sporting and cultural event. And team New Brunswick will include francophones and anglophones; it is open to all. That's right; it is not just for francophones. But this world-class event would never be coming to New Brunswick if we weren't a bilingual province.

Working together, we are going to have to debunk some of the myths.

- Bilingualism is a hard-earned constitutional right. It cannot be eliminated without a constitutional amendment. And that's not a bad thing. It brings many, many benefits to our province.

- The tough financial decisions are behind us. We are on track for a balanced budget by 2020. People don't need to look over their shoulders for fear of cuts. And they don't need to look for someone or something else to be cut instead.
- In 2015, New Brunswick's GDP grew by 1.9%. This is the fastest rate of growth in years. And most of the jobs in our economy require only English. The same goes for government jobs.
- Northern New Brunswick is not a drain on the south. A study by the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick showed that northern economic activity is responsible for 12% of the jobs in Southern New Brunswick.

Those are some macro examples of the good story to tell. But on a more micro level, I have heard so many stories of cooperation and understanding.

- A guy in Tracadie who was excited about the work happening at the new metro centre in Moncton.
- The time I was at the Dumont hospital in Moncton and a francophone lady asked me to pray for her husband to get quickly transferred to the Saint John Regional Hospital.
- The francophone from Kent County who told me his life had been saved at the rural hospital in anglophone Perth-Andover after a stabbing.
- How when I spoke this winter at the Bathurst chamber of commerce, the first thing mentioned was how they felt solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Sussex who had just lost the potash mine.
- The woman in Fredericton who was so happy to hear we were building a youth mental health centre of excellence in Campbellton.
- When I toured the turnaround project at the refinery last year and many of the workers were francophones from the north. And they were so happy to have the opportunity to be there working side-by-side with anglophones from the south.

We are one people in New Brunswick. We have the same hopes and dreams. We face the same challenges. We all want the same things. We want a strong economy so our kids get to stay here and so our people get to come back here. We all want to invest in education so our children can read and so our children can have the best quality of life possible. And we all want strong health care so we can keep our families healthy. We're all in this together. We've got to get that message out there.

As Barack Obama once said: "We have a stake in one another...what binds us together is greater than what drives us apart."

Thank you for listening. I hope you will help spread this message.