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## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

### Appointment of Mr. Graham Fraser— Consideration in Committee of the Whole

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, October 4, 2006

## THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 4, 2006

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

#### APPOINTMENT OF MR. GRAHAM FRASER— CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

The Senate in Committee of the Whole in order to receive Mr. Graham Fraser respecting his appointment as Official Languages Commissioner.

**Senator Tardif:** Hello, Mr. Fraser. I was thrilled to hear of your nomination. I know you are very familiar with official language minority communities and with the issues of linguistic duality and cultural diversity.

I have also had the privilege of reading your latest book, *Sorry, I Don't Speak French*. I strongly recommend it to all senators.

As you know, the federal government plays a very important role in promoting linguistic duality within Canadian society, through the Official Languages Act, for instance. Although it is a federal act, Ottawa has traditionally tried to encourage the provinces to promote linguistic duality and support their respective official language minority communities.

Yet certain provinces, despite significant funding, still resist the notion of linguistic duality as a fundamental Canadian value.

Mr. Fraser, I would like to know how, as commissioner, you intend to encourage the reluctant provinces to support their official language minority communities and what measures might you take to encourage the provinces to accept that our official languages constitute an important advantage and asset for Canada?

**Mr. Fraser:** I feel somewhat self-conscious about answering your questions, since I am very aware of the work you have done in this field. Having had the opportunity, thanks to my book, to speak on phone-in programs and at conferences, one thing caught my attention: I did not really sense the visceral opposition to linguistic duality that seemed to prevail 10, 20 or 30 years ago. This was even confirmed by a recent survey for the Commissioner of Official Languages.

However, I feel that the governments are behind, compared to public opinion. I believe that, in addition to a persuasive role, the commissioner is also responsible for ensuring that governments understand that their reluctance, which was understandable 30 or 40 years ago, no longer corresponds to the concerns of their citizens today. For example, people in British Columbia and Alberta continue to show a sustained interest in immersion schools. In Vancouver, the Chinese community submitted a special request to the French embassy to have an Alliance française office opened in a Chinese community centre. Support from the grassroots has already been established, I believe.

Sometimes, the reluctance of governments is caused by erroneous information. What I hope to be able to do is take this message to the government and to institutions such as the universities and the NGOs, as well as the various institutions of civil society.