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Review of Government Polling—
Appointment of Daniel Paillé

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, April 19, 2007

THE SENATE

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLLING— APPOINTMENT OF DANIEL PAILLE

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Mr. Fortier. Although he showed a great deal of strong emotions yesterday, he did not answer any questions.

I will therefore ask the same question again today. Why is it that when the Auditor General said, and I quote:

[English]

... we found that the government managed its public opinion research activities adequately.

[Translation]

The minister saw fit to ask for and to provide Mr. Paillé with a budget from public funds, which he stated may total up to \$1 million. He also gave Mr. Paillé access to all documents, including those on the federal strategy for the referendum debate. Is the minister not making all federalists vulnerable to the separatist threat?

Hon. Michael Fortier (Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Honourable senators, I thank Senator Tardif for her question. I would like to remind you that the 2003 Auditor General's report indicated that there were concerns arising from small sample of polling contracts.

It was a promise our party made during the 2005-06 election. There was nothing secret about it, it was all transparent. If we formed the government, we were going to ask someone to

examine a much larger sample. We shared the concerns expressed by the Auditor General.

As for the possibility of Mr. Paillé discovering information that could harm federalism, I will not speculate for the time being. His mandate is limited to the contracts given by governments for polling. Thus, I am inclined to believe that the honourable senator's fears are probably unfounded.

Senator Tardif: I am speaking, Mr. Minister, of the choice of individual. Will the minister explain to an Albertan such as myself why he chose someone who not only voted in favour of the referendum but who initiated it and who, when a minister in Mr. Jacques Parizeau's cabinet, contributed to the ambiguous question of 1995 and wished to trick Quebecers into breaking up our wonderful country?

• (1405)

Senator Fortier: Honourable senators, I was explaining this to Senator Dawson yesterday. I am talking to an Albertan, but I know you are well aware of what goes on in Quebec and I am quite pleased about that. The result of the 1995 referendum was especially close and Quebec society has changed. I invite you to consider the results of the provincial election on March 26. I do not want to spend too much time analyzing this result, but I think the scene is changing in Quebec.

Yesterday I mentioned that one of my sisters voted yes in the referendum. There are men and women who have moved on to other things. Mr. Paillé came to Ottawa yesterday, to appear before the Parliament of Canada with me to accept this mandate. Instead of worrying for nothing, I ask that you wait for his report and once it is tabled — again, I want to stress that it will be public — I invite you to read it and if you still have apprehensions, we could discuss them then.