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Cancellation of Meeting of Official Languages Committee

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, May 9, 2007

THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

CANCELLATION OF MEETING OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMITTEE

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): If the language rights of the official language minority communities are as important as the Leader of the Government has indicated, can she then explain why her colleagues from the other place cancelled — at the very last minute — the meeting of the Official Languages Committee, although representatives of the Court Challenges Program had travelled from Winnipeg to attend that meeting?

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, the government is not responsible for all of the committee's work in the other place. Government members are on the committee, and I think the decision of the committee in the other place is best left to them.

We all saw what happened in the committee last week. The chairman of that House committee, Guy Lauzon, stated publicly that, as this matter is before the courts and also under the study of the Commissioner of Official Languages, it was best to cancel the

meeting and delay the study for a few weeks in the interests of all. We saw what happened last week when the committee became part of other hearings. That was not helpful to anyone, whether they be French or English speaking.

Mr. Lauzon, who I hasten to point out is Franco-Ontarian, is a very credible spokesman for our party on these issues. He would only act on this matter in a responsible way. I believe that the explanation he expressed yesterday is valid. Cooler heads should prevail. As I said before, this matter is before the Commissioner of Official Languages, and Mr. Lauzon has decided it would be appropriate to wait a few weeks before bringing this matter back to the attention of the committee in the other place.

Senator Tardif: I take it, then, that the chairman of the committee made that decision unilaterally, without consulting the steering committee and, perhaps, making arrangements for the people who had planned their trip to know about the decision in advance, before arriving in Ottawa five minutes before the meeting?

Senator LeBreton: Obviously, the honourable senator would not expect me to be involved, nor should I be, in the operation of the committee in the other place. Therefore, I cannot answer that question. Only the committee chair and the steering committee of that particular committee could provide that particular answer to the honourable senator.