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## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

### Report of Commissioner—Cancellation of Programs—Effect on Linguistic Rights

Question by:

**The Honourable Claudette Tardif**

**Tuesday, May 15, 2007**

## THE SENATE

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### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

#### REPORT OF COMMISSIONER—CANCELLATION OF PROGRAMS—EFFECT ON LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. In his statement this morning, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, said that:

The government's message has been very positive. Unfortunately, the actions this government has taken in the past year do not reflect this message.

According to Mr. Fraser:

The elimination of the Court Challenges Program in particular delivered a serious blow to Canadians' ability to defend their language rights . . . [and] raise[s] some doubts about whether it is really committed to implementing these new legislative obligations.

He says that by eliminating the Court Challenges Program:

The Harper government violated the act and did not consider the rights of linguistic minorities when he cut certain services.

When will this government put its money where its mouth is and assume its responsibilities by fully respecting the Official Languages Act, which this government supported when it was amended in 2005?

[*English*]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)):** Honourable senators, we received the report from the Commissioner of Official Languages this

morning. The government is reviewing the report and will respond. Of the little bit of the report that I had a chance to read, I was happy and delighted to see that it recognized the Prime Minister for his commitment to linguistic duality and stated that he had served as an important role model for other public officials.

I am very proud of the Prime Minister in his commitment to this area. I believe our government has demonstrated a strong commitment to linguistic duality and official language minority communities. Budget 2007 invested an additional \$30 million for cultural, after-school activities and community centres. This was on top of the \$642 million over five years that was provided in the Action Plan for Official Languages for the promotion and development of official languages.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Tardif:** In light of Mr. Fraser's statements, are we to conclude that this government is all talk and no action and that it is not fully assuming its responsibilities under the Official Languages Act, for instance, by suspending the work of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages?

[*English*]

**Senator LeBreton:** I do not believe the honourable senator can assume, or presume, any such thing. I wish to point out to Senator Tardif that, since taking office, we have announced significant support for official language minority communities and linguistic duality: \$1 billion over four years, until the year 2009, in education agreements with the provinces and territories; \$64 million over the next four years, up until 2009, in agreements with the provinces and territories for services; and \$120 million in agreements for the official languages minority communities. I do not think it is correct for the honourable senator to stand here in this chamber and state that this government is not fully supportive and, indeed, fully committed to official languages and linguistic duality.