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## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

### Reinstatement of Court Challenges Program

Question by:

**The Honourable Claudette Tardif**

**Tuesday, February 26, 2008**

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

[Translation]

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

#### REINSTATEMENT OF COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government. By abolishing the Court Challenges Program in September 2006, a program the Prime Minister had bragged about at the UN four months earlier, the government — allow me to quote Mr. Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages — “violated the act and did not consider the rights of linguistic minorities when he cut certain services.”

Criticism came from all sides. All the groups agree that it was a mistake and an injustice to abolish this program. In the words of one of your colleagues:

Eliminating the right of linguistic minorities to use a legal avenue of redress violates the very essence of the Constitution Act, 1982, and the Official Languages Act.

Can the Leader of the Government tell us whether the government will do its duty and reinstate the program?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)):** Honourable senators, Senator Tardif would know that this particular issue is before the courts this week with the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Fraser. Therefore, it would be imprudent for me to comment on a matter before the courts.

With regard to official languages, I have clearly outlined on a number of occasions the government’s commitment to official languages and the development of Canada’s minority language rights. We are awaiting the report of the former Premier of New Brunswick, the Honourable Bernard Lord.

**Senator Mercer:** Oh, oh.

**Senator LeBreton:** I do not think it is such a laughing matter. I think he is a very serious person, Senator Mercer. I am surprised

that the senator would laugh at a serious issue such as official languages. This is a serious matter that the government takes very seriously.

It will be on the record that Senator Mercer thinks it is a laughing matter that the government is committed to official languages.

**Senator Segal:** Shame, shame!

**Senator LeBreton:** Because the particular issue of the Court Challenges Program is before the courts, obviously the senator is asking a question that I cannot respond to, as she knows full well.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** Why did the government not consider the impact the elimination of this program could have on the advancement and development of official language communities? How can you ignore the justified demands of your electors?

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** I remind the honourable senator that in Budget 2007, one year ago, the government committed \$30 million in additional funding over two years to support official language minority communities and linguistic duality. On January 22, 2008, Minister Verner announced a nation-wide list of projects that will benefit from the funding. I will be happy to provide the honourable senator with that list.

As all honourable senators know, 2008 marks the four-hundredth anniversary of Quebec City, and the government announced \$110 million in funding for the organization and celebration of this wonderful event.

The honourable senator cannot say that this is an area where the government is not taking its responsibilities seriously, as we have a minister and a government very much committed to official languages. The seriousness of the commitment of the government to official languages was reiterated in the Speech from the Throne, which the party to which the honourable senator belongs supported wholeheartedly.