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State of the Economy

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

THE SENATE

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STATE OF THE ECONOMY

[*Translation*]

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Over the past few days, the government has been leaking key budget points before the official introduction, which is to take place today. When ministers make such announcements during press conferences or to the media, they demonstrate disdain for the role of Parliament and undermine the credibility of the budget and the Minister of Finance.

When will this government stop courting public opinion and playing politics at the expense of our political system and start caring about the interests and needs of Canadians, particularly in times of economic crisis?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: That question is interesting, honourable senators, because the government was urged to consult widely with the Canadian public and with all the stakeholders in our economy, from small businesses to large corporations, provinces and municipalities. All ministers of the government, except for the brief period of time between Christmas and New Year's, have work diligently. I believe this consultation was the broadest, largest and most extensive ever undertaken by a government — all conducted in an open and transparent manner with public meetings.

Honourable senators, the ministers who travelled around the country in the last week, dealing specifically with their portfolio, were simply carrying forward on this requirement to be honest and transparent about their plans for their departments. They scheduled public meetings that were open to anyone who wished to attend — and, of course, the meetings were well attended — to report to these various groups, for example, on mining, the

forestry industry, the cultural industries and the tourism industry — as to what they could expect in the budget as a result of their consultations.

Senator Comeau: A breath of fresh air.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: I have a related question. Consultation is all well and good, but those statements went beyond consultation. Those were official announcements made by ministers. In the past, such actions would surely have been censured.

It seems that the government is more interested in managing the media than in managing the economy.

Just eight short weeks ago, the government announced that there was no recession and that there would be no deficit. Now that we are in the middle of an economic crisis, the government is announcing that we can expect a \$34 billion deficit this year and a \$30 billion deficit next year.

This government has a habit of saying one thing and doing another; how can we possibly have confidence in it?

• (1450)

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: I thank the honourable senator for her question, but the fact remains that we are speaking about an economic update and I cannot be responsible for people's expectations of what they thought would be in the economic update. The government has been projecting a surplus for this current fiscal year, not a deficit. That is the situation.

Regarding the announcements made by various ministers, there is ample proof that no details were revealed that would affect the markets. There is nothing untoward or unlawful about cabinet ministers making announcements that affect their departments, especially when the announcements are the direct result of consultations they have had with people regarding matters concerning their own portfolios.