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Funding of Official Languages Support Programs

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, March 5, 2009

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

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FUNDING OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, Canadian Heritage has tightened its eligibility criteria, preventing the Association canadienne française de l'Alberta from intervening in the *Caron* decision, which calls for compliance with the Official Languages Act. The Alberta government is appealing this decision. However, no representatives of official language minority communities were consulted on these changes to the eligibility criteria.

Will the government agree to keep its promises to minority language communities? Will it enable the ACFA to intervene in the *Caron* case by giving the association the necessary money allocated for that purpose under the Program to Support Linguistic Rights?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)): Minister Moore has a great number of projects and applications under his purview. I am not privy to each and every one of those, and the reasoning behind whether or not they are successful in obtaining funding. I would need to ask him specifically about the issue that the honourable senator has raised.

• (1420)

As honourable senators know, the government has invested a significant amount of money in the area of linguistic duality, supporting our communities, especially with regard to our two official languages. I do not have every application that was submitted to the minister for funding, so I need more detail, honourable senators, as to what organization requested what funding, and what response they received from the government.

In fairness, when we speak of individual applications, a question like that is better placed on the Order Paper so the honourable senator can receive a more exact response.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: I thank the Leader of the Government in the Senate for checking with the minister. Could she also ask him if the criteria have changed?

When the Court Challenges Program was abolished and the Program to Support Linguistic Rights established, we were told that applications made to the court before 2006 would be respected. The case we are discussing was submitted before 2006. By eliminating this financial support, the Association canadienne française de l'Alberta, the official representative for all Alberta francophones, was prevented from intervening.

Could the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us whether there has been any change in the criteria of this new Program to Support Linguistic Rights?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Is the honourable senator referring to the case reported in the newspapers these last few days respecting the traffic ticket? I thought the honourable senator's initial question was about a specific group that had applied for some specific funding.

If the honourable senator is referring to the former Court Challenges Program, as honourable senators know there is a new program to support linguistic rights and it focuses on mediation and out-of-court settlement. It gives the official language minority communities better access to linguistic rights, as well as information on alternative methods for solving conflict.

As Minister Moore stated a few weeks ago, the planned implementation for this program is for 2009, and he indicated that this program is on target to be implemented as planned.

Senator Tardif: This court case was financed in the previous Court Challenges Program. When that program was eliminated, the minister committed that previous court cases would be financed all the way to the Supreme Court. The Alberta government has taken this case to appeal. This group has asked for funding because the case began prior to 2006. That funding is now being withdrawn.

Is there now new criteria, and the old criteria are not respected? Is there no longer a commitment by the government and Minister Moore to support these types of cases?

Senator LeBreton: I was not aware of notification that any funding has been withdrawn. I am not familiar with the details of the case. I read about it in the newspaper over the last few days. I will take the honourable senator's question as notice and seek further clarification from Minister Moore as to the new program to support linguistic rights and what procedures are in use regarding cases that were under the old Court Challenges Program.