



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

2nd SESSION

• 40th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 146

• NUMBER 23

HERITAGE AND OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

CBC/Radio-Canada

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

THE SENATE

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CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, on Wednesday, March 25, CBC/Radio-Canada announced that it would have to lay off 800 employees and make major changes.

Contrary to the tradition of splitting federal funding between the French- and English-language networks, one third and two thirds respectively, budget cutbacks at the French-language network have resulted in staff reductions of almost half of the total number of employees.

Honourable senators, we have a situation where the government no longer respects its commitments to francophone communities outside Quebec. Not only has the government delayed implementing the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality, but it is cutting an essential service for these communities, the Radio-Canada broadcasts.

Why is the government not taking action to protect the broadcasting services provided by CBC/Radio-Canada to these francophone communities in a minority situation?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, with regard to the CBC, as I pointed out last week in answer to questions from Senator Poulin, the government has acknowledged the difficult challenges facing the CBC, and indeed all of the broadcasting industry, which is obviously experiencing difficult economic times.

The government has provided \$1.1 billion to the CBC, and how the CBC operates within its mandate and disburses the funds are decisions of the CBC.

I would be happy to make the senator's concerns known to the Minister of Heritage, so he can pass them on to the CBC, although I point out that the government does not interfere in any way with how the CBC dispenses the money provided to it. Those are decisions of the board of directors of the CBC.

As I said last week, it is hoped that the CBC will fulfill its mandate in providing service across the country, especially to the regions, and, most particularly, to the minority language

communities in the various parts of the country, and also that the CBC recognizes its responsibility to Canada's official languages policy.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: The Conservative government could have taken steps to limit the damage, but it refused to do so. In the West, nine full-time positions and four part-time positions will be cut; in Manitoba, five staff members and one manager will be laid off; in Saskatchewan, one person will be laid off; in Alberta, one full-time position and one part-time position will be eliminated; in British Columbia, four employees will be laid off. Noon-hour broadcasts have all been cancelled and will be replaced by a national call-in program, and Saturday morning broadcasts will be consolidated across the western provinces.

How can the government justify the loss of local and regional programming for francophones in western Canada?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: I believe the concerns the senator raised are legitimate and are better addressed to the board of directors and the management of the CBC. The government does not instruct the board of directors of the CBC in how to run its affairs.

Honourable senators, I mentioned earlier that the government will monitor the decisions of the CBC to ensure that the CBC delivers services to Canadians as their mandate requires. However, for the government to interfere in any way or even be seen to interfere with decisions of the CBC's board of directors would be met, I am sure, with great howls of outrage by all, particularly the CBC.

• (1440)

Honourable senators, as I mentioned in my earlier answer, I am happy to raise the honourable senator's concerns with the Minister of Canadian Heritage because the government is monitoring the decisions of the CBC to ensure that the CBC properly provides service to Canadians in both official languages and, most particularly, in those regions of the country that rely specifically on the CBC.

The honourable senator's concerns are legitimate, but the CBC should respond to these matters directly, and I am happy to apprise the minister of her concerns.