



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

2nd SESSION

• 40th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 146

• NUMBER 37

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Rights of Francophone Military Personnel

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, May 26, 2009

THE SENATE

Tuesday, May 26, 2009

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

RIGHTS OF FRANCOPHONE MILITARY PERSONNEL

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the Commissioner of Official Languages released his report today. My question relates to official languages.

In 2006, Yves Côté, the former Canadian Forces Ombudsman, conducted an investigation concerning the lack of respect for the rights of francophone soldiers at CFB Borden. On August 7, the former Interim Ombudsman, Mary McFadyen, indicated that her office's investigation revealed that a considerable number of courses were not being offered to francophone students at CFB Borden and CFB Galetown. This situation still has not changed. At the largest National Defence training school in the country, 40 per cent of basic courses and 47 per cent of advanced or specialized courses are not available in French for francophone soldiers and new recruits.

When will this disrespect towards francophone soldiers be corrected?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, I notice there was a press release from the official opposition this morning attacking the government on the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The official opposition put one copy of the press release out in French, as they should, with an English heading. Perhaps a little bit of sensitivity can be shown on that side as well.

Senator Comeau: Shame.

Senator LeBreton: With regard to the —

Senator Tardif: It is bilingual.

Senator LeBreton: "It is bilingual," the honourable senator said. That is pretty good, actually.

The report of the Commissioner of Official Languages was released, as we all know, and we are always thankful to the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, for his hard work.

With regard to Camp Borden, I will obtain an update, but I believe the honourable senator referred to recommendation 5, which is where the commissioner recommended that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages implement as soon as possible the commitments announced in the *Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013: Acting for the Future* to support second language learning. I have not read the full report but I believe the Commissioner of Official Languages has indicated that more work needs to be done in this area. As honourable senators know, we have agreements with the provinces and territories concerning education with regard to official languages.

Under the next agreements, the provinces and territories plan to establish targets for second language learning, taking into account the respective challenges around the country.

With regard to Camp Borden specifically, I will take that part of the honourable senator's question as notice and obtain an update.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: My question today was not specifically related to the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, but more particularly to the situation at CFB Borden.

When the minister makes her inquiries, I wonder if she could consider the following points: At CFB Borden, 77 per cent of courses in the area of health and dental care are not available in French. As for advanced courses in electrical engineering and mechanics, which are needed to reach the rank of officer, none of those courses are offered in French. They are available only in English.

What message does that send to francophone soldiers? Are they not full citizens of this country? When will this government fully honour its commitments under the Official Languages Act?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, obviously that situation is not acceptable. I will seek advice and clarification on what is being done about it.

• (1500)

I hasten to add that it was the previous government that closed down the military training facility in Saint-Jean. Of course, that is a decision that we are paying for today.