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STUDY ON APPLICATION OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT AND RELEVANT REGULATIONS, DIRECTIVES AND REPORTS

Fourth Report of Official Languages Committee and
Request for Government Response

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, October 7, 2009

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

STUDY ON APPLICATION OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT AND RELEVANT REGULATIONS, DIRECTIVES AND REPORTS

FOURTH REPORT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES
COMMITTEE AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT
RESPONSE—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Chaput, seconded by the Honourable Senator Hubley, that the fourth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *Reflecting Canada's Linguistic Duality at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games: A Golden Opportunity, Follow-up Report*, tabled in the Senate on September 15, 2009, be adopted and that, pursuant to rule 131(2), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government, with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages and the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada being identified as ministers responsible for responding to the report.—(Honourable Senator Champagne, P.C.)

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I want to speak today to draw your attention to the 16 recommendations in the report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, which was tabled on September 15. I would like to acknowledge the important work done by this committee, of which I have the privilege and the pleasure to be a member. I would also like to recognize the committee chair, the Honourable Maria Chaput, and the vice-chair, the Honourable Andrée Champagne, whose work is much appreciated.

This report recognizes that VANOC — the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, Canadian Heritage and the federal institutions involved have made noteworthy and encouraging efforts. Nonetheless, less than five months before the celebrations begin, a number of crucial measures still are not in place. Time is short, and the government must discharge its responsibilities with respect to francophone rights.

Clearly, the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver are an ideal opportunity for Canada to showcase its linguistic duality to the world. The Senate Committee on Official Languages hopes that collaboration among all the partners in Canada's francophone communities will continue to be strengthened so that the remaining problems can be resolved.

Allow me to pay tribute to the Commissioner of Official Languages for his rigour and diligence. Since taking up his mandate, he has made this international event one of his highest priorities. His recent report provides information on the progress made and identifies the challenges still to be tackled before

the start of the Games. Based on his recent observations, the Commissioner stated:

... it is imperative that VANOC, Canadian Heritage, and federal institutions act swiftly and implement corrective measures so that the deficiencies identified in this report do not jeopardize the success of the Games.

In its report, the Official Languages Committee emphasizes the commitment of VANOC, which has set up an advisory committee on official languages, and appreciates the release of information on the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay.

I remind the government that, in conjunction with the dedication and collaboration of the partners involved, it needs to act with urgency by demonstrating sustained leadership and unparalleled commitment in order for the linguistic duality of our country to be unequivocally reflected in these Games.

Allow me to remind you that there are legitimate reasons why the government must take quick and effective action. First of all, linguistic duality represents a fundamental value of our country and is the envy of the international community. Canada's reputation is constantly enriched by this distinguishing value. In addition, we know that French and English are the official languages of the International Olympic Committee. Consequently, as the host country of the Games, Canada must distinguish itself as an example in this regard. The 2010 Vancouver Games will be a golden opportunity for Canada to promote its linguistic duality both here and abroad. Why not take advantage of this unique opportunity and have the Vancouver Games serve as a working model for linguistic duality?

It is well known that the International Organization of the Francophonie has high expectations for Canada because, of all the members, Canada is the best equipped to command respect for linguistic duality during the Games.

When the Commissioner appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages on September 28, he expressed the expectations of the International Organization of the Francophonie:

They want Canada to set the standard for the next games, the London Games in 2012, or for subsequent games.

He also said:

Our main challenge is that the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie takes for granted that we will be setting the gold standard. This is an incentive for us to meet any challenges head on because there is an assumption on the part of the international Francophone community that Canada will be up to the task and that they will be able to use the same system to convey to the English speaking community that this is indeed possible.

When the Commissioner of Official Languages tabled his report, the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that he would increase the budget for the Olympic Games by \$7.7 million, with \$5.3 million of that being allocated to interpretation and

translation services, and the rest to bilingual signage and the medal ceremonies. That is good news!

Nonetheless, there are still significant situations that require a quick response with respect to translation, recruiting volunteers, distributing information, signage, representation by francophone artists, and services offered in both official languages by the Canada Border Services Agency and the Vancouver and Toronto airports.

• (1510)

Since most people going to Vancouver for the Olympic Games will travel by plane and come in contact with federal institutions, the Commissioner wanted to carefully examine the measures those institutions have taken. He is quite concerned about his findings. He said:

Generally, there is still no reflex to actively offer service in English and in French.

One of the committee's recommendations addressed that: we indicated that it is essential to guarantee that services are available to the public in both official languages at the Toronto and Vancouver airports. This recommendation calls on organizations such as Air Canada and airports to adhere to existing requirements, namely to provide services in both official languages.

As the Commissioner emphasized:

We must remind them that all of this is not just some rule that they might forget about, but that it is current and real, that it is intertwined with our Canadian identity and with the fundamental concept of service to Canadians and the travelling public.

I would like to highlight some of the other recommendations in the report, such as developing tools for volunteers to provide for the active offer of services in both official languages; pursuing efforts with community newspapers and radio stations to ensure that Canada's francophones are well informed about the Games; pursuing discussions with the hotels in Vancouver and Whistler to ensure that their clients have access to broadcasts of the Games in both official languages; ensuring that Canada's francophone communities are reflected in the cultural celebrations that take

place before, during and after the Games; and ensuring that Games-related signage is available in both official languages.

Because action is needed urgently, the Senate Official Languages Committee considers that direction must come from above. Only the Privy Council Office can succeed in obtaining a commitment from all federal institutions on this matter. The evidence heard showed that confusion persists as to how responsibilities for official languages are defined.

The Senate committee is of the opinion that the responsibilities of the Federal Games Secretariat and of VANOC in this regard need to be clarified.

In light of these observations, the Senate Committee recommends that the Privy Council Office provide stronger leadership to all federal institutions and partners involved in the organization of the Games.

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages believes that there is still enough time for all parties involved to make appropriate changes as long as they act quickly to remedy the aforementioned shortcomings.

Oversights do happen, and we must be vigilant in correcting them. For example, two weeks ago, at a recruitment centre set up at the University of Ottawa to hire young workers for the Vancouver Games, no information in French was available. It is most unfortunate that the RCMP, which hired the recruiting firm, did not comply with its obligations under the Official Languages Act.

When she tabled the report, the Senator Chaput insisted that it was vital that all parties involved in organizing the Games must undertake to take positive steps to promote the full recognition of the use of French and English. I will add that time is getting short, and it is the responsibility of the government to quickly show its good faith by working harder to achieve this priority. The government must immediately do everything it can to fulfil its obligations to francophone and anglophone minorities.

Thank you, honourable senators, for your commitment to making the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games a success. Let us hope that these games set an example in both of our country's official languages.