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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Quality of Translation

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, April 22, 2010

THE SENATE

Thursday, April 22, 2010

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

QUALITY OF TRANSLATION

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):

Honourable senators, it is regrettable that Statistics Canada sent a letter to French-language health care facilities written in poor-quality French. Whether it was done by a computer or a public servant, the translation was incoherent and badly needed revision.

When will the Government of Canada take the importance of proper translation services seriously? When will the Government of Canada ensure the equality of the official languages by providing services of equal quality?

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Senator Comeau has handed me a copy of the invitation extended to senators by the Honourable Gary Lunn. He has pointed out that, according to him, this invitation has been properly translated.

With regard to the official languages policy of the government, the government writ large adheres to all the requirements of a bilingual country by recognizing its two official languages.

Rather than rise in Parliament to point out errors in translation made by a department of government, which is the honourable senator's right, it would be helpful if in the future, when such an example occurs, the honourable senator takes measures to draw this error to the attention of the department responsible. I do not think anyone expects me to speak with any knowledge on the proper choice of English or French. I see many examples of

poorly written English emanating from government departments. Perhaps the people responsible for this work in some departments are not as qualified. It is unfortunate, but I do not think anyone would want to score points on this situation. It is regrettable that these things happen, and it would be helpful if errors were drawn to our attention so we can correct them.

Senator Tardif: I have two points of clarification before moving on to my supplementary question. I was not referring to Senator De Bané's example. Rather, I have an example of a letter sent out by Statistics Canada. I know that errors can be made, but we are talking about the face of government before the people. The government has an obligation to put forward its best face. My question to that end is, what is the government doing to ensure the provision of equal service and equal quality in both official languages?

Senator LeBreton: The government is doing exactly what any government has done since the coming into force of the Official Languages Act. I suggest grievances such as those expressed by the honourable senators be referred to the Commissioner of Official Languages, who is an officer of Parliament and responsible for investigating such complaints, as he did when such concerns arose before and during the Vancouver Olympics. Even though there were problems with the opening ceremony, Mr. Fraser reported that all other activities of the Olympics were extremely well done and met the requirements of the Official Languages Act. I do not think this problem has anything to do with this or the previous government. Policies of governments of all political stripes through the years adhere to the obligations of the Official Languages Act. If a public servant at Statistics Canada lacks a specific skill or if there is a systemic problem throughout Statistics Canada, then it is only proper to draw the matter to the attention of the Commissioner of Official Languages.
