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**Annual Report of Official
Languages Commissioner**

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, May 26, 2010

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

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ANNUAL REPORT OF OFFICIAL
LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. The Commissioner of Official Languages tabled his report on official languages yesterday and expressed his concerns about the government's laissez-faire approach to official languages in the federal public service.

In 2009, your government abolished the Canada Public Service Agency and transferred its responsibilities and the Centre of Excellence for Official Languages to the Chief Human Resources Officer of the Treasury Board Secretariat. This Centre of Excellence has not received the resources required to carry out its new responsibilities and, what is worse, the number of employees was reduced from 30 in 2008 to 13 in 2009.

My question echoes the Commissioner's request. How will the government ensure that this new approach truly promotes the application of the Official Languages Act and does not result in a political climate of laissez-faire?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, the government thanks the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Graham Fraser, for his report and looks forward to reviewing all of the recommendations contained therein.

I am pleased to see that Commissioner Fraser noted in his report that the government has "... succeeded in requiring a level of bilingualism among its senior executives that was difficult to imagine four decades ago." With regard to the Centre of Excellence, the President of Treasury Board has met with the Commissioner of Official Languages to discuss the report. Minister Day has assured Mr. Fraser that the government is committed to promoting bilingualism in the public service.

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Centre of Excellence for Official Languages continues to carry out the responsibilities required under the Official Languages Act. As an example, the Centre of Excellence is hosting an annual conference of official languages champions this week.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, the Centre of Excellence has lost its status and its resources. The number of employees dropped by 60 per cent, as I indicated, between 2008 and 2009, and the Official Languages Branch had 74 employees in 2006. The departments are left to fend for themselves and do not have the internal capability to understand, interpret and analyse their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

When will the government show leadership and when will it provide federal institutions with the means to fully carry out their responsibilities?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: I thank the honourable senator for the question. The Centre of Excellence has been restructured to better align its roles with deputy heads responsible primarily for official languages in their respective departments and agencies. The report of the Commissioner of Official Languages states, "... there is a network of official languages champions; there are accountability and reporting requirements."

The President of the Treasury Board and the government are committed to the program, which has been restructured to place the responsibility on each department and each agency for implementing Canada's Official Languages Act.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, I appreciate that the program has been restructured. However, if there are no additional resources to accompany the restructuring, how can the minister ensure that the departments and agencies will have the necessary resources to do their work?

Senator LeBreton: Senator Tardif, I would think that \$1.1 billion would provide the necessary resources. This is the largest amount for official languages ever invested by any government at any time in the history of the country. The government is delivering the necessary support in respect of minority language rights, not only in the federal public service but also in minority language communities across the country.

More than 70 per cent of the commitments our government made in the *Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality* have been confirmed and funded. This represents more than \$792 million. Therefore, I take issue with the honourable senator's claim that the resources are not there to implement our official languages program, because they most certainly are.

• (1410)

Senator Tardif: I have a supplementary question. The number of employees has gone down from 74 to 13 in order to help the departments and the federal institutions to meet their obligations. How can you meet the capacity and say you are fulfilling your obligations when you have reduced the number of employees from 74 to 13?

Senator LeBreton: First, with respect to restructuring, rather than having the program structured completely within Treasury Board, it has now been restructured into the departments and the responsibility is being given to the deputy ministers and agency heads therein. To say there are not people designated to implement this program in those departments is quite incorrect.

As part of this restructuring from Treasury Board into the departments, there are other people now tasked with this important matter, and they are not all located in one place. I believe that has contributed to the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages wherein he said that the government had succeeded in requiring a level of bilingualism among its senior

executives that was difficult to imagine four decades ago. That is one of the reasons why it is important to place the responsibility for the program in the departments, under the deputy ministers and the agency heads who are directly responsible for implementation.
