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## TREASURY BOARD

### Incentive Program for Government Employees

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, June 17, 2010

## THE SENATE

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[Translation]

### TREASURY BOARD

#### INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, the senators on our side of the chamber share the President of the Treasury Board's desire to eliminate the enormous \$54 billion deficit the government has accumulated over the past few years. It goes without saying that no money can be saved by building useless artificial lakes, amphitheatres and media centres. However, we believe that money can be saved within the public service.

This week, Minister Stockwell Day announced that federal bureaucrats will be given \$10,000 bonuses for finding ways to save taxpayer dollars. The Public Service Alliance of Canada has condemned this initiative, stating that by providing this kind of incentive to employees, the federal government's new program "will pit worker against worker and cause chaos in the workplace."

Why is the government not trying to create a more collaborative environment for the public service by working with all public servants instead of creating a competitive environment to eliminate the huge deficit it has accumulated?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, the honourable senator continues to misstate the facts with regard to the deficit and the plan for the government. The honourable senator knows full well that before the economic downturn, the government had paid down about \$40 billion on the country's debt. The deficit was entered into as part of a worldwide stimulus plan by the G20 in Washington in November 2008. That was followed up at the meeting in Pittsburgh last year.

The official opposition threatened a coalition with the NDP and the Bloc Québécois because they said they felt the government had not provided enough stimulus, so the government introduced *Canada's Economic Action Plan*, which has worked. It has turned Canada's economy around and put Canada in the best economic position in the world. Our action plan has provided job opportunities for businesses and organizations across the country to assist Canadians to work through the economic downturn.

As a percentage of GDP, the deficit is manageable and the lowest of any country in the G8. It is much lower than the largest deficit ever left in the history of this country — that of the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The deficit as a percentage of GDP was either 8 per cent or 9 per cent. As much as the Honourable Senator Tardif continues to try, she should get the facts right on the deficits.

With regard to the bonuses for the public service, this program was announced by the President of Treasury Board. The government will implement this new incentive program to encourage all employees to identify more efficient ways to deliver services to Canadians within their departments. For an employee to receive an award, significant improvements to a government program must be recommended and tangible benefits must be demonstrated. This award will be given six months after successful implementation of the proposal. It will consist of 10 per cent of the savings measured in the first year of implementation, up to a maximum of \$10,000.

• (1430)

Similar programs are running successfully in other Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions. This is a way to reward people for "thinking outside the box," as they say. I have heard nothing but positive comments about this initiative from people who work in the Treasury Board with Minister Day.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, it seems as though the leader has forgotten that this government began with a \$12 billion surplus. But let us come back to the question at hand. The president of the Public Service Alliance, John Gordon, said:

Instead of investing in more public services, the government is paying for ways to reduce the size and scope of government.

Does the leader really believe that this is justifiable as a way to reduce spending in the public service?

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** With regard to the surplus that the honourable senator claims to have left, rather than hoarding that money for a rainy day, as the Liberal government was doing, we paid down the debt and gave it back to the people to whom it belonged and who deserved it — the taxpayers of Canada. In addition to paying down the debt by \$40 billion, we reduced the GST from 7 per cent to 5 per cent.

**An Hon. Senator:** That was a good idea.

**Senator LeBreton:** It was a great idea. My Tim Hortons husband and his friends sure think it is a great idea.

With regard to the public service, we obviously value the people who work in it. They have done, and continue to do, a great job for the government. An incentive program for people who come up with innovative ideas to assist the government to deliver services to Canadians is a worthwhile endeavour. I am sure that the workers in the public service who plan to participate will be greatly motivated to look for ways to save taxpayers' dollars and deliver services to the Canadian public in a more efficient way. Minister Day is to be congratulated for demonstrating his faith in our terrific public service by offering this program.