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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Linguistic Duality

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, November 4, 2010

THE SENATE

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

LINGUISTIC DUALITY

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Yesterday in this chamber, the leader expressed her government's commitment to official language communities and to enforcing the Official Languages Act. However, the measures taken by her government since it came to power in 2006 suggest quite the opposite.

For example, in 2009, the government abolished the Canada Public Service Agency and transferred its responsibilities and the Centre of Excellence for Official Languages to a new organization, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer of the Treasury Board Secretariat. Departments have since been left to their own devices and do not have the capacity, internally, to understand, interpret and analyze their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

Because these responsibilities changed hands, the public service now lacks official language coordination and champions.

Does the leader believe that her government's decision has anything to do with the poor performance of federal institutions, which, according to Volume II of the report on official languages, are still not managing to promote linguistic duality in Canada and create equitable workplaces?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I will repeat what I said yesterday. Our government is fully committed and has demonstrated by our actions our full support for Canada's Official Languages Act. As honourable senators know, we have a five-year road map for official languages. It involves the largest amount of money ever invested by any government in official languages, and we are presently well into the program.

• (1350)

With regard to the honourable senator's citation of a specific report, I say the same as I said yesterday: That is why we have an Official Languages Commissioner. The Official Languages Commissioner, Mr. Graham Fraser, is the person to address these concerns so that he can properly investigate.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, action is needed now. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Official Languages Centre of Excellence has seen a considerable drop in its workforce in recent years. From 2006 to 2009, the number of employees went down from 74 to 13 people.

Furthermore, the Treasury Board Secretariat no longer performs some of the important roles it did in the past. It no longer serves as a liaison with federal institutions. It no longer provides interpretation of the Official Languages Act. Furthermore, because of a lack of resources, it no longer acts as a leader in promoting bilingualism and it no longer performs the task of identifying official languages best practices.

With measures like these, that are making federal institutions less and less accountable, what message is the government sending to Canada's official language communities, and how does it plan to correct and address the damning findings in the report on official languages?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, the government relies on the work of an officer of Parliament, the Official Languages Commissioner. The Official Languages Commissioner tabled his annual report within this week. If the Official Languages Commissioner has reported areas where improvement is required or if something is not fully in compliance with the Official Languages Act, the government is fully committed to working with the commissioner and the department and will do everything it can to correct the situation.