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HERITAGE

City of Edmonton Bid for Expo 2017

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

THE SENATE

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HERITAGE

CITY OF EDMONTON BID FOR EXPO 2017

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

Yesterday, we learned that the federal government has slammed the door on Edmonton's bid to host the world's fair in 2017, the only Canadian city to bid on this event. Let me remind this house that the three-month event, expected to attract nearly 5.3 million visitors, would have marked the one hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, as well as Canada's one hundred and fiftieth birthday, and all while showcasing discussions on sustainability, human energy, fossil fuels and other international issues.

Suffice it to say that Edmontonians and Albertans alike are extremely disappointed with the government's decision. In fact, it was the Prime Minister who encouraged municipalities to move forward on bids for this expo event. The Mayor of Edmonton, His Worship Stephen Mandel expressed his dismay by stating:

It's clear when it comes to Edmonton's growth and ambition, Ottawa is simply not interested, and our minister has failed us absolutely, completely.

Bid committee member Randy Ferguson also expressed his frustration, saying:

Albertans took a kick in the teeth today.

How could the leader's government decide to let Edmontonians down with its refusal to support Edmonton's bid for Expo 2017, an international event that would be most beneficial for all Canadians?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I think it is very clear from the remarks of the Minister of Finance over the past months, and indeed as late as yesterday, that a key element of our next phase of economic recovery will be to return to balanced budgets. As the

Minister of Finance emphasized, our government will not make significant new government spending commitments.

This requires difficult decisions to be made, no doubt. One of those decisions was not to proceed with the funding for a bid to host Expo 2017 in Edmonton. Supporting an expo bid would require the federal government to spend over \$1 billion once we have taken into account the full cost of security and other federal obligations to host an event of this size.

It should be noted that in the past the government did support Edmonton's bid for the World University Games.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: I have a supplementary question. We have just learned that the federal government will spend \$300 million to close Camp Mirage in the United Arab Emirates, and, at the same time, that it has decided to not support Edmonton's bid to host Expo 2017 for economic and financial reasons. However, honourable senators, the economic, social and cultural benefits of holding Expo 2017 in Edmonton cannot be denied.

How can the leader justify her government's refusal to provide the support that is necessary to hold such an event?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: The figure the honourable senator quoted for Camp Mirage is a speculated one. I do not think there has been any confirmation of that figure. Having said that, we are dealing with the Edmonton bid. In this context, and in view of the commitment of the government to return to balanced budgeting, we felt that we must show respect for taxpayers and not proceed with support for this bid.

• (1450)

Clearly, the government will have to make some tough decisions and, undoubtedly, this was a difficult one. In the interests of the taxpayer, the \$1 billion security cost, which we have already had evidence of, cannot be supported generally, not only by the citizens of Canada but also the citizens of Alberta.