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EDMONTON'S BID FOR EXPO 2017

Inquiry—Debate Continued

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, December 9, 2010

THE SENATE

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INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Banks calling the attention of the Senate to the decision by the Government of Canada in respect to Edmonton's bid for the 2017 World Expo.

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, it was with great interest that I listened to Senator Banks' inquiry speech on the failure of this government to support Edmonton's bid for the 2017 Expo. I share my fellow Edmontonians' disappointment and outrage at this government's decision not to support the only Canadian bid for this international event.

Since I was a member of the board of directors for both the 2001 IAAF World Championships in Athletics and the 2005 World Masters Games held in Edmonton, I have witnessed firsthand the value and benefit such events can have for a city, a province and a country. I have no doubt that Expo 2017 would have been a success, given Edmonton's stellar reputation of hosting spectacular world-class events that are always on budget.

This government has misled Canadians by stating that security costs could have been in the range of hundreds of millions of dollars. In fact, documents obtained by CTV Edmonton show that the total security bill would have been \$91 million, with the federal government being responsible for approximately \$11 million, or one ninth of the cost.

As some seem to have forgotten, Expo 2017 is not the G8 or the G20. We are looking at a low-threat security assessment for an event that would have been economically beneficial to our country. Further, as Senator Banks noted in his inquiry, most of the costs associated with Expo 2017 would have come after 2015, the year by which our Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance have indicated that we would have eliminated the deficit.

This government does not appear to care about Edmonton's aspiration to be recognized on the world stage. Not only would Expo 2017 have showcased the oil sands, but it would also have given Alberta and Canada the chance to educate millions of visitors on this subject. Not supporting Edmonton's bid further demonstrates how this government sees Albertans as nothing more than a guaranteed vote and, therefore, easy to ignore.

As Paul Marck, editor of *Alberta Venture* magazine, notes on his blog:

. . . there is not one shred of evidence offered by the feds over alleged high security costs of the Expo bid, other than the example of its own clumsy, fumbling ineptitude.

Marck is not alone. In a series of letters sent to the *Edmonton Journal*, many Edmontonians are voicing their frustrations. For example, Sylvia Kother of Edmonton writes:

Why should Harper and his Conservatives care about Edmonton when we vote for them regardless of what they do or say?

They had a huge surplus when they got elected as the government; they have not spent all the stimulus monies, but, hey the Prime Minister's Office and communication keeps spending more and more money to ensure the Conservative message gets out.

They are taking Edmontonians for granted.

Albertans in communities across the province are also livid. Stewart Shields of Lacombe writes:

Alberta got exactly what it deserves from this unpredictable federal government that gets their vote regardless.

Why would the Harper Tories waste federal spending on a province that will continue to return Tory MPs to Ottawa?

Better to have the type of spending Edmonton sought for Expo 2017 spent in areas such as Ontario and Quebec, that may reward the Tories for their stand.

If these letters are any indication, there is a growing sense that, to this government, Alberta simply does not matter. Further, more and more Albertans feel they are being abandoned by a government to which they have been exceptionally loyal. This feeling of abandonment can be explained by Edmonton's weak representation at the cabinet table.

In the November 23 edition of the *Edmonton Journal* journalist Gordon Kent notes that Mayor Stephen Mandel:

. . . pinned the blame squarely on Public Works Minister Rona Ambrose, the region's representative in cabinet, saying she didn't do enough to sell the project to her colleagues.

• (1840)

This sort of situation would not have happened when The Honourable Anne McLellan was in Parliament. The only Liberal member of Parliament from Alberta, she served as Deputy Prime Minister and was Alberta's voice at the cabinet table. As Senator Banks noted, she did not always say, yes; she knew when and how to say, no.

During her 13 years of service as an MP for Edmonton Centre, the city and the province directly benefited from the presence of a strong advocate in Ottawa. Ms. McLellan took Alberta's and Edmonton's concerns and aspirations to heart, often securing funding and government support for events she knew would be beneficial to the cities and to the province in the long run.

Honourable senators, what stings most about this decision is that we Edmontonians and Albertans were allowed to dream about the 2017 World Expo and what it would bring to the city. We were allowed to hope but, all of a sudden, this hope was squashed like a bug on a rug with little to no explanation.

Senator Mitchell: They are laughing.

Senator Tardif: It is no laughing matter. Edmonton was encouraged to dream and to invest money in an event that would never be. If the reason behind the government's rejection to support the bid is economic, then they should have had the gall to inform the bid committee when the bid was first developed. They could have said, "We cannot offer you the \$700 million you are asking for; but this amount is what we can give you."

If this had happened at the outset, I am positive that the 2017 World Expo bid committee and the City of Edmonton likely would have been able to find the missing funds. Instead, the bid

committee was met with three years of silence with no indication that funding was even an issue.

Honourable senators, Edmonton, Alberta and Canada had much to gain from this event. The organizing committee of the 2017 World Expo were expecting major economic spinoffs, with an estimated increase in gross domestic product of \$2.6 billion, the creation of over 37,000 jobs and more than 5 million visitors.

At the same time, Alberta would have been able to showcase the New West and highlight its success in the energy sector, as well as its innovative solutions to answer tomorrow's energy needs. Unfortunately, this plan was only a dream, a dream that included celebrating Canada's one hundred and fiftieth birthday with the rest of the world.

Honourable senators, the decision of the government to kill Edmonton's bid to host Expo 2017 is both exceptionally disappointing and extremely discouraging to both Edmontonians and Albertans.
