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HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Reorganization of Service Canada

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, March 9, 2011

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

REORGANIZATION OF SERVICE CANADA

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question. How can the leader say that the decision to reorganize Service Canada — which will violate the rights of 500,000 francophones — is permitted under part VI of the Official Languages Act, which governs the language of work, and part VII, which deals with positive measures?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I responded clearly with regard to Service Canada in my first response to Senator Chaput. To repeat, staff are not prevented from speaking to clients in the other official language in a unilingual office if they are able to do so. That is the choice of the employee.

All Canadians have the option to speak to someone in the official language of their choice, regardless of the Service Canada

office they enter. We will follow all legislative requirements to provide quality service in the language of an individual's choice to clients who come into Service Canada offices.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, I have trouble understanding this. Who will a client speak to if no one is in the office who can understand them? The word should not be “prevent,” but rather “encourage.”

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I have made it clear that Service Canada will follow all legislative requirements to provide quality service in the language of the client. It only makes sense that in any office in the country people should be encouraged to speak both official languages.

As we know, there are both francophone and anglophone areas of the country where that is not possible. However, that does not take away from the policy of the government. We adhere to the Official Languages Act. We take all the recommendations of the Official Languages Commissioner seriously and we always respond to them.

We believe that under the Official Languages Act Canadians have the right to receive services in the language of their choice.
