



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

3rd SESSION

• 40th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 147

• NUMBER 95

TREASURY BOARD

Access to Information User Fees

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Monday, March 21, 2011

THE SENATE

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TREASURY BOARD

ACCESS TO INFORMATION USER FEES

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Last week we learned that the federal government is considering increasing user fees as the government reforms Canada's dysfunctional access to information system. According to an internal analysis conducted by Treasury Board, responsible for overseeing the Access to Information Act:

Amendments to the fee provisions of this act would help to control demand and reduce administrative costs.

Given that access to information is already difficult and limited under the Harper government, why is her government suggesting to further control access to information requests, a basic right of all Canadians, by increasing user fees?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I hate to disappoint the honourable senator, but our government has a better record. As a matter of fact, in the Information Commissioner's March 10 report, the only two organizations causing grief to the access to information regime are the CBC and Canada Post.

• (1440)

With regard to access to information fees, all access to information requests are handled by a delegated authority, and ministers and their staff are not involved in any of these requests.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: Since the last reforms to the Access to Information Act were proposed, in 2002, the service standards have deteriorated considerably. For example, there are very long delays and fewer access requests are granted due to a broader definition of security exemptions and of matters that fall under cabinet confidence.

If your government increases user fees for access to information requests, will it commit to improving service standards, including wait times and refusal rates?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, through the Federal Accountability Act, I believe our government increased by 70 the number of organizations that fall under the Access to Information Act. As the President of the Treasury Board has pointed out, the response time has been good and is improving, with the exception of Canada Post and CBC.