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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES Obligations of Federal Institutions

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, June 16, 2011

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[*Translation*]

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OBLIGATIONS OF FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the Conservative government's budget has confirmed what a number of groups and organizations feared — federal spending cuts of \$11 billion by 2015-16.

It is vital that in the review of spending and programs just getting underway, the government take into account the obligations of federal institutions under the Official Languages Act.

Marie-France Kenny, president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, expressed her concerns about the objectives of the federal budget cuts and stated, and I quote:

Federal institutions have very clear obligations with regard to the offer of services in both official languages and positive measures to support community development. These are quasi-constitutional obligations that must remain a priority in the review of spending and programs.

How does the leader intend to ensure that her government's budget cuts will not affect the rights of Canada's 2.5 million francophones and francophiles?

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, the record of the government with regard to our Official Languages Act and our commitment to it is clear. We strongly support our linguistic duality. I believe I answered this question last week. We are investing \$1.1 billion in the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality, the largest amount ever provided by a federal government. We are three years into the five-year commitment on the roadmap. Today, over

71 per cent of the commitments we have made in the roadmap have been confirmed and funded, which amounts to, at this point in time, \$795 million.

I think the premise of the honourable senator's question is not correct. We are committed to Canada's two official languages, and we have a record to prove it.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: First, can the minister confirm that there will not be any budget cuts to programs designed to enhance the vitality of official languages communities or to programs related to the roadmap that has been put forward? Will the minister make this commitment?

Second, if such budget cuts were to be made, would her government make a commitment to consult with the official languages organizations and communities before making those cuts?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: This is same type of question I used to get about Status of Women. There are various programs of the government. Many organizations apply for government funding. Just because a group received government funding from the year dot does not mean it will go on forever. Other people apply for funding and receive it.

There are many examples, some of which I used in the last Parliament in response to Senator Chaput with regard to official languages programs that were supposedly cut. I pointed out many examples of their funding. Groups apply for funding. Their funding ran out, and we funded other organizations.

It is an impossible question to answer. We have increased our funding under the roadmap and various organizations benefit from it. Some may get funding that never got funding before, and others may not. That is the nature of the program, so I cannot make any such guarantee.