



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

---

1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 47

---

## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Second-language Training—  
Linguistic Duality

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, February 2, 2012

## THE SENATE

Thursday, February 2, 2012

[Translation]

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

#### SECOND-LANGUAGE TRAINING— LINGUISTIC DUALITY

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. The government recently announced the elimination of nearly 200 second-language teaching positions at the Canada School of Public Service. Linguistic duality is one of the defining features of Canada's federal public service. These cuts deprive the public service of resources and tools that help ensure that Canadians receive services in the official language of their choice and help cultivate institutional bilingualism within the public service.

The government is saying that these cuts are not part of the austerity measures. If that is the case, why is maintaining second-language teaching positions not a priority for this government, in order to keep these valuable tools and resources within the public service?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, I have stated on many occasions in this place the government's strong commitment to our linguistic duality and our full support of the Official Languages Act.

With regard to the Canada School of Public Service language training, the government's commitment remains ever strong in the teaching of Canada's official languages. Language training will continue to be provided for all those who need it. The private sector, universities and colleges have the ability and the expertise to provide training to the public service at a high level of service and at a much more reasonable cost for the taxpayer.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** Although the government has reiterated that the cuts will not affect the provision of language instruction, I believe that it is quite normal for Canadians to wonder about the government's commitment to the linguistic duality of our country.

Recent cuts at the Canada School of Public Service are just the latest in a long list of decisions that have raised questions about the government's commitment to bilingualism: the appointment of a unilingual justice to the Supreme Court, changes in hiring criteria for senior public servants — such as the chair of the CRTC — where bilingualism is no longer essential, the appointment of a unilingual auditor general, the abolition of half of the positions at the Official Languages Centre of Excellence, among others.

In view of this record, why should Canadians believe that the cuts are not just another step on the road to gradually dismantling bilingualism?

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** The honourable senator can list a litany, as she just did. We all know the situation with regard to the Supreme Court of Canada. It was fully debated in this place. The arguments for the Supreme Court of Canada not being under the Official Languages Act are well known. That provision was put in place by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, for very good reasons.

With regard to the Auditor General, he is now in his position. He has appeared before committee. He made a report on the status of his language training, and he is very committed to functioning in both of Canada's official languages. I think it behooves all of us to take him at his word. He is acting in good faith, and I do not know why we should doubt for a moment his resolve in being successful in this area.

With regard to the head of the CRTC, I do not know of what the honourable senator speaks. This is a designated bilingual position. I do not know whether the honourable senator is speculating on who the next person will be. Obviously, Senator Tardif knows something that I do not, but I think the record speaks for itself.

The government is firmly committed. We have expended considerable resources on the road map. We are fully committed to Canada's linguistic duality. However, when we are going through the various agencies and departments of government, our commitment is to find savings. This particular decision is not part of this process now. It was a part of a process before, where the department concerned felt there was better use of taxpayers' dollars and very good training for those who require French- or English-language training in other schools and universities. That does not in any way take away from the commitment of the government to all aspects of the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** I can give the minister another example. Last week, a Federal Court judge ordered the Minister of Labour, Lisa Raitt, to appoint a bilingual arbitrator with labour relations experience to supervise arbitration proceedings between Canada Post management and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

The minister had appointed a unilingual arbitrator. That appointment was challenged by the union. The decision handed down last Friday by the Federal Court in Montreal confirmed that the individual in question could not and should not have served as arbitrator, mainly because he did not speak French.

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, I must confess that I am not aware of the situation the honourable senator describes. I will take the question as notice.