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CANADIAN HERITAGE
National Archival Development Program

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, May 10, 2012

THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

NATIONAL ARCHIVAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. For the past 26 years, Library and Archives Canada has been supporting over 800 local Canadian archives working to preserve and make available unique archival documents pertaining to the history of Canada and its people.

Since 2006, that financial support has been distributed through the National Archival Development Program, which was shut down by the government on April 30.

As the chair of the Canadian Council of Archives stated in a letter to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, this decision will have a far-reaching and devastating impact on the Canadian archival community and its ability to preserve our nation's history.

Why did the government choose to cut the long-standing funding that our national archives need to continue the important work of preserving and sharing Canada's heritage?

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I am sure the honourable senator has noticed, as I have, much to my chagrin at times, that we have moved into a new age of technology, which some of us still find difficult, but are managing.

Library and Archives Canada is moving into the digital age, and more services will be available to Canadians online. The evidence thus far is that Canadians are utilizing and accessing information to a much higher degree than they ever did in the past.

This is very good for Canadians, who will be able to access historical content regardless of where they are located. The new Canadian Feature Film Database, as well as the Lest We Forget Project, which some of us are very well aware of, are just two initiatives aimed at making Library and Archives Canada more accessible than ever.

Again, the honourable senator often asks questions — as she did the other day — along with the Honourable Senator Chaput, about the Canada Periodical Fund. When I did some checking on it, this fund has not changed at all, despite the allegations from the other side.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, I suggest that the government leader check her sources because, according to our information, which is from primary sources, that is not at all the case.

Back to my question. The government leader mentioned that the work of Library and Archives Canada will continue its work using new technologies. According to the Canadian Council of Archives, the National Archival Development Program also funded the development of a national online archival catalogue, as well as provincial and territorial versions, so that all archival institutions, even the smallest ones, can reach Canadians. According to the Canadian Council of Archives, the recently announced cuts will sabotage all of the work done to date, including advances involving new technologies. Why?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: First, honourable senators, no government — and certainly not a government that cares as much about our history as this government does — will engage in practices that would in any way diminish the ability of Canadians to access archival material.

• (1400)

However, Senator Tardif made a specific comment — I did not get the name of the board — and, just as I did on the periodicals, I will seek further information in order to satisfy the honourable senator that the government takes these matters very seriously.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, it was the Canadian Council of Archives. Let me give an example of the impact these cuts will have by quoting the CCA's chair, Lara Wilson. She said:

Canada will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017. Archives have been building toward this anniversary so all Canadians have access to their documentary heritage, but elimination of NADP will seriously jeopardize the effectiveness of how this celebration can be accomplished.

While the government is spending over \$11 million to recreate the War of 1812, it is abolishing a program that gave only \$1.7 million to the CCA, an amount that has not changed since the 1990s. The CCA will have an essential role to play during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Why is it experiencing the greatest cuts in the heritage sector?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, perhaps Senator Tardif did not listen to my first answer, because we are doing just the opposite. We are providing more services to Canadians, not fewer, and engaging in new programs to properly educate Canadians and ensure they are aware of our great history. I reiterate that we have increased the services. We are putting more information online and more services are available.

It is very hard for me to stand here and accept that somehow or other we are undermining or cutting back on a very important service that is provided to Canadians, especially when we have important events like the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 this year and the upcoming 150th anniversary of Confederation.