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## FOREIGN AFFAIRS Understanding Canada Program

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

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[Translation]

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

#### UNDERSTANDING CANADA PROGRAM

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate and has to do with the recent decision by the Department of Foreign Affairs to eliminate the Understanding Canada program.

The program is intended for foreign academics who want to study about or conduct research on Canada. Some components of the program are also available to promote teaching and publications about Canada in various disciplines. It is important to note that for every dollar invested in Canada, \$14 is invested by researchers and professors from the international Canadian Studies community.

The government keeps saying that it wants to promote commerce, investment and Canadian interests abroad. What better way to promote these priorities than with such a program, one that costs the public purse very little and produces excellent results, according to the government's own verification?

Can the Leader of the Government explain the rationale behind this decision, which seems to go against the government's own priorities?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, as I have said in this place many times, various government departments went through an exercise of self-assessment and came to the government with several proposals where certain agencies and activities of the government were no longer deemed to be necessary. Other organizations have filled the spot, or they have outlived their usefulness.

With regard to the specific program, I will take the honourable senator's question as notice.

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, this program costs about \$5 million annually to taxpayers and results in over \$70 million of expenditures in Canada annually. This program has more than paid for itself.

To put the cost of this program into perspective, I note that Germany spends \$5 million annually on academic relations just

with Canada. Furthermore, the program is an important source of leverage for acquiring additional money from other sources such as endowment funds and foreign governments. As a result, the actual impact of this cut will be magnified.

Let me quote Mr. John Graham, a former Canadian diplomat who headed the Department of Foreign Affairs' academic relations division when the program was started. He stated:

Canadian studies works like a hybrid engine. You put in a little gas and foreign universities and governments keep the battery charged. It is so cost effective that it is a no-brainer — which must mean that cutting the program would have to be a zero brainer.

Madam Leader, why is the government jeopardizing millions of dollars in economic benefits, as well as a great deal of international influence, profile and allies that helped promote Canadian interests, by cutting this program?

• (1500)

**Senator LeBreton:** Again, I would have to get the specific details, but I hasten to add that quoting people who were formerly in charge of programs that they probably devised themselves is probably not the best way of convincing me it is a good program to keep.

Honourable senators, as we went through the whole cost analysis, looking for savings in the government, each department, through their senior public servants, brought to the table programs that they had deemed were no longer effective, efficient, cost effective or that had been replaced by other programs that were yielding much better results.

With regard to this specific program, as I indicated earlier to Senator Tardif, I will be happy to provide more details by written response.

**Senator Tardif:** I thank the honourable senator for her answer. Also, I would most appreciate it if she could provide information on the program that has replaced the existing one.

**Senator LeBreton:** I did not mean to suggest that in this particular case a program might have replaced it. I am saying that, overall, people brought to the table programs that had outlived their usefulness. Some were relying on universities and some on the private sector. In this particular case, I do not know. However, if there is a replacement program, I am sure it will be part of the answer.