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FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Foreign Students
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Research and Development

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, November 7, 2012

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FOREIGN STUDENTS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, according to a recent study presented to Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, the government's efforts to promote Canada abroad as a destination for post-secondary studies are not producing the expected results.

This study, which evaluated the Imagine Education in Canada program launched by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada in 2008, revealed that Canada is generally not the first choice of foreign students.

Given that the program is coming to an end and that the number of foreign students attending Canadian universities has plateaued in the past few years, what does the government plan to do to improve Canada's international reputation as a top destination for education?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, there is a lot of detail in the information the honourable senator seeks. I will be happy to get a response from the Department of Foreign Affairs with regard to foreign students.

Senator Tardif: I appreciate the honourable senator looking into it.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the same report called for a number of improvements in the marketing of Canada as a study destination, such as raising Canada's profile as a destination for advanced scientific research. Unfortunately, many opportunities to support advanced scientific research have fallen victim to government cuts in recent years. Unique scientific research centres in the North, like the PEARL research station and the Kluane Lake Research Station are shutting down because of funding cuts. The world renowned Experimental Lakes Area program, which offered unmatched opportunities for scientists in the world, is being cancelled. Recently, the government has cut nearly 100 of Canada's top researchers and scientists at the National Research Council and is slashing funding for basic research to focus instead on research dictated by what can be easily commercialized.

If we want to have a credible brand abroad as a top-notch destination for advanced scientific study, does the government

not believe that our record on investing in research should match the image that we want to project?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the honourable senator for the question. I would argue that our record does speak for itself. We have invested more in science and technology than any government in Canada's history. We made important new investments in science and technology in our Economic Action Plan 2012, including new funding for Genome Canada, the National Research Council, the research granting councils and more.

Honourable senators, I know it is difficult to acknowledge this, but this is a fact: Canada is ranked number one in the G7 for our support for higher education, research and development. We have invested heavily to develop, attract and retain the world's top researchers here in Canada. In September, we announced the 70 recipients of this year's prestigious Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships, a program that our government launched in 2010. This program, for those who do not know, ensures that Canadian postdoctoral researchers have the support that they need.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, the leader has put forward a list of programs that the government has supported, but let me put forward a list of cuts that have been made by the government: the elimination of the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy; the elimination of the position of national science advisor; and the elimination of Environment Canada's famous ozone science group, which invented the UV index now used around the world to inform the public. This was eliminated this year.

These examples — and I could give other examples as well — demonstrate an erosion of the capacity to collect evidence and to bring evidence forward into public debate in Canada. Although the government has been spending millions to celebrate the War of 1812, there has been no celebration of Canada's scientific achievements. Why is the government gradually chipping away at the very advanced scientific capacities that we are trying to promote?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, this is getting like a broken record. These are all things that the honourable senator has said before. Again, Canada stands number one. In some of the organizations she suggests, other scientific bodies or other universities have picked up that work. Just because there has been a program in place for some considerable period of time does not mean that it goes on forever. There are other programs and other bodies that fill in and take the place of some of these organizations that have outlived their usefulness.

I would argue that a government that has put more money than any other government in the history of the country into science, technology, research and education and is ranked number one in the G7 is a pretty good record to stand behind.