



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Support for Research and Development

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, February 28, 2013

## THE SENATE

Thursday, February 28, 2013

[Translation]

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, on February 20, Democracy Watch and the Law Clinic of the University of Victoria, proof in hand, asked the Information Commissioner of Canada for a full investigation into the government's communication policy concerning scientific research. This request is just the latest denunciation of the government's policy concerning federal scientists. The government's policy muzzles Canadian scientists and does not allow the public full and timely access to publicly funded science.

Can the leader tell us if the government will finally put an end to its policy of muzzling federal scientists, which keeps them from doing their work fully and keeps Canadians from having access to the science they funded?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, I have answered this before. The government is proud of our scientists and proud to promote the work they do. We have invested a great deal in science and research in this country. That is why we share research material and publish research findings. Our scientists provide thousands of interviews per year regarding their work, and they lecture at conferences all over the world. They are not being muzzled.

• (1430)

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, clear examples of the muzzling of government scientists were again reported in the media in the last few days. In one case, the government has imposed new confidentiality rules on an Arctic science project assessing ocean circulation. DFO scientists and an American researcher from the University of Delaware have been collaborating on this project since 2003. According to the American researcher, the previous Canada-U.S. agreement for the project signed in 2003 was 11 pages long, contained two

sentences on publication and encouraged the sharing of information. The new agreement imposes sweeping new restrictions and, according to the American researcher, could prevent researchers from publishing scientific findings, blogging about their project or sharing information on the project with the media and public, which is encouraged by the U.S. agencies co-funding the project. She added that the new agreement was an affront to academic freedom and a potential muzzle and is refusing to sign it, ending the collaboration on this project.

Honourable senators, this is political control over the communication of scientific results. How are these rules not meant to muzzle researchers with inconvenient findings?

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, I am not aware of this article. I do not know the information that the senator has put before the Senate. I doubt very much that they have been muzzled. I will be very happy to take the question as notice and get a written answer.

**Senator Tardif:** Let us get the facts straight, honourable senators. Government scientists are not allowed to speak to journalists without the consent and supervision of public relations specialists. Delays for interviews are far too long. In some cases, scientists have been told they cannot speak to the media at all, even if their research findings have been published. In fact, scientists from Environment Canada, from Fisheries and Oceans and from Natural Resources have been informed that they cannot speak to the media without prior consent. How is that not muzzling?

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, I am afraid I cannot match Senator Tardif as a drama queen. All I can say is that the policy of the government, whether it was the Mulroney government, the Chrétien government, the Martin government or the Harper government, is that ministers are responsible for speaking for their own portfolio, which is often the case when there is government work to be communicated. Having said that, I will resist the dramatic flair. I am totally unaware of the instance of which the honourable senator speaks. I will take her question as notice and provide a written response.