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## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Research and Development

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

## THE SENATE

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[Translation]

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression mark World Press Freedom Day every year — this year it was May 3 — by publishing a report on the state of freedom of speech in Canada. This year, the report again takes a critical view of the government, which it says has a culture of secrecy.

The government prides itself on being the most open and transparent government in the history of Canada. Yet, the CJFE gave the government a D- for its pitiful performance in matters of transparency and access to information. The government can boast that it placed 55th out of 93 countries, just ahead of Angola and Thailand, according to a ranking by the Centre for Law and Democracy.

I would like to remind honourable senators that, in 2009, the Information Commissioner at the time, Robert Marleau, had already confirmed that the Conservatives had one of the worst track records in terms of government transparency. Since then, rarely a week goes by in which we do not discover new incidents of manipulation or public servants who have been muzzled.

Honourable senators, the time when the Prime Minister made transparency a key component of his election platform seems to be long past. When can Canadians expect him to keep his promises?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, when I read the report, I was not the least bit surprised. This is consistent with the unfair reports that have been made against our government for many years and against previous Conservative governments. It is something that happens to governments only when the Conservatives are in government.

We have brought in many measures, including the Federal Accountability Act. We have opened up portals on the Internet for people to get information. There are a lot of erroneous reports about the availability of information that we do our best to correct. The fact of the matter is that I do not accept this report. I think it is grossly unfair to the government.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, the policies and methods used to muzzle government scientists are a prime example of this culture of secrecy. The CJFE's report is particularly hard on Fisheries and Oceans Canada because of, and I quote, "its zeal in muzzling scientists, controlling its message and keeping critical information away from the public."

A case that clearly illustrates this censorship is that of the American researchers who have been working with Fisheries and Oceans Canada in the Arctic since 2003. Earlier this year, these researchers were forced to agree to new policies prohibiting them from publishing their research without the minister's approval. They refused this form of censorship, and with good reason.

My question to the leader is this: why is the government interfering in the dissemination of scientific research?

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** I have answered this question many times, honourable senators. The scientists that work for the government have participated in many speeches, media interviews and background documents for research. These scientists have not been muzzled.

As was the case with the previous government, when people are working specifically on a project for the government, the government is ultimately responsible for answering for that project or policy. However, by and large, scientists in all departments — and the numbers are quite strong and good — are absolutely free to participate in lectures, media availability and what have you.

As was the case with the previous government, with people working on specific projects for the government, obviously the minister responsible for that particular portfolio would have to answer to the public for those policies.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, even the former Clerk of the Privy Council, Mel Cappe, who served from 1999 to 2002, recently stated at a conference that he was concerned that scientists are being muzzled by recent government policies. He thinks that, instead, scientists should be encouraged to share their findings with the public. What a concept.

The government is exerting tight control over scientists, and in some cases, it is quite simply prohibiting them from sharing their findings.

Can the leader tell us how controlling information is supposed to allow our researchers to promote science and policies that are based on factual, non-partisan information?

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** Again, honourable senators, I will point out that the government has invested significant amounts of money in research and development in science. Last Friday, the Prime Minister made another significant announcement along with our other colleagues around the country, including Senator Ogilvie. We are extremely proud of the world-class work our scientists and researchers do. We understand that research findings and their benefits must be effectively communicated and shared with Canadians.

Federal scientists regularly provide media interviews and publish thousands of research papers each year. For example, in 2012, in one department alone, Environment Canada published more than 700 scientific articles.

**Senator Tardif:** Yet the scientists are urging the government to get science right. James Turk, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, said the following:

From the muzzling of scientists to the serious under-funding of basic research at our universities and colleges, the federal government is making dumb choices that will have serious consequences for all Canadians.

When will the government get science right?

• (1440)

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, anyone can get up and quote a particular person who does not agree with the approach of this government. That is their right. Just because one or two people say these things, it does not mean that somehow or other this is, in fact, indicative of what the government has done.

I will put this on the record. Honourable senators already have some of this information, of course, as it was provided to Senator Tardif via a delayed answer.

From 2007 to 2012, the government committed over \$1.7 billion to the Canada Foundation for Innovation to support advanced research infrastructure across Canada. Economic Action Plan 2013 proposes that the \$225 million in interest income of the Canada Foundation for Innovation be committed to advanced research infrastructure priorities and sustaining the foundation's long-term operations.

The National Research Council Industrial Research Assistance Program provides advisory and financial assistance to help small- and medium-sized companies build their innovation capacity and create high-paying jobs. Budget 2012 provided

new resources to double the program support for companies. Economic Action Plan 2013, which we have before us at the moment, proposes to provide \$20 million over three years to help small- and medium-sized enterprises to access research and business development services at universities, colleges and other non-profit research institutions of their choice through a new pilot program to be delivered through the National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program.

Since 2007, the government has provided over \$440 million to Genome Canada, including \$60 million through Economic Action Plan 2012. Budget 2013 proposes to provide an additional \$165 million in multi-year funding beginning in 2014-15.

Since 2007, the government has provided over \$415 million in new funding for scholarships and awards to Canadian students and researchers. This money was allocated to the Canada Graduate Scholarships, Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships, Gairdner International Awards and the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships.

Since 2007, the government has provided over \$350 million in new ongoing annual funding to the Canadian granting councils, including \$48 million for the Indirect Costs Programs. Economic Action Plan 2013 further strengthens Canada's advanced research capacity, providing \$37 million in new annual support for research partners with industry through the granting councils.

I could go on, but obviously the person whom the honourable senator quoted overlooked all these significant investments and the seriousness with which this government treats science and research.

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, let me just put this on the record: This is not the view of just one or two people I have quoted. The Canadian Association of University Teachers is the national voice of 68,000 academics and general staff at 120 universities and colleges across Canada.

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