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## INDUSTRY

2011 National Household Survey

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, June 5, 2013

## THE SENATE

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[Translation]

### INDUSTRY

#### 2011 NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Last month, Statistics Canada released its National Household Survey. This is what Statistics Canada had to say about it:

It will not, however, provide a level of quality that would have been achieved through a mandatory long-form census.

In fact, the data quality was so poor that they could not even report on 1,100 Canadian communities. In Saskatchewan, they reported on only 57 per cent of municipalities.

In 2006, census data from only about 200 communities across Canada were suppressed. It is obvious that rural communities and even entire regions of the country are under-represented in the data.

How can the government claim that this information is as accurate and useful as that obtained with the long-form census?

[English]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, Statistics Canada also had this to say:

At the national, provincial level, all of this information is pretty solid. It's high quality.

Obviously, the National Household Survey has provided useful information and data for Canadian communities, representing 97 per cent of the population. This was the first time, honourable senators, that there has been a voluntary long-form census. Clearly, there are some areas that require improvement and, obviously, by the time it is necessary to conduct the next census, the areas of concern will have been addressed.

• (1350)

I believe that the results of the first effort in a voluntary long-form census were very positive and that the data was extremely useful to communities representing 97 per cent of the population.

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, even if more Canadians answered the survey, the data is much less accurate and reliable because it is less representative of the population.

The response rate went from 94 per cent to 68 per cent. Groups such as rural and First Nations communities are being left out. The experts at Statistics Canada have confirmed that the data in the Conservative's new survey is deeply flawed. I quote Statistics Canada:

... it is difficult to anticipate the quality level of the final outcome....

It will not, however, provide a level of quality that would have been achieved through a mandatory long-form census.

The former head of Statistics Canada even resigned in protest after the government gutted the census.

Let me also quote Ian McKinnon, Chair of the National Statistics Council, a government agency that advises Canada's Chief Statistician at StatsCan.

This will not have the detail or precision of the traditional long-form census. For small groups and small areas, it will be harder to get a clear view of Canada.

David Bellhouse, a statistics professor at the University of Western Ontario, says:

Because of the minimal response in some areas, the data are basically useless at the community level....

Those data are completely unreliable in terms of any kind of planning purpose for people wanting to use the data for planning about their community.

Honourable senators, why is the government not interested in knowing the true picture of this country?

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, we certainly are interested in knowing the true picture of this country. We are committed to collecting statistical data while protecting Canadians' privacy.

Again, in the last voluntary long-form census, more than 2.5 million households responded to the survey. As I indicated to the honourable senator, this is the first time for a voluntary long-form census. There are ways that it can be improved that respect and balance the need for public data and the requirement to protect the privacy of Canadians.

We have the mandatory short form as well. There have been suggestions by experts that a few more questions could be added to the short form.

As well, honourable senators, there are many organizations in addition to Statistics Canada in this country that provide reliable data that is available to many organizations that rely on statistical data to serve their various communities.

[Translation]

**Senator Tardif:** Honourable senators, this lack of information affects small communities in particular, such as francophone minority communities. Compared to the 2006 census, there are five times the number of communities, including many small rural communities, for which there is no data.

The Federation of Francophone and Acadian communities of Canada, and many other groups, had warned the government of

the negative impact that its decision could have. I would like to quote what the federation's executive director said after the data were released:

Our communities are small. They are dispersed. We have a problem if Statistics Canada cannot guarantee that small communities will figure into its analysis of trends based on the results of the National Household Survey. Whether we are talking about employment income, women's income, education, or access to various services, we cannot analyze the data. Municipalities and villages lack the information to establish their policies.

Why is the government refusing to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent wisely by using reliable data?

[English]

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, I have clearly answered that question. Statistics Canada has said that a lot of good data has come from the voluntary long form.

I did indicate that this was the first time there has been a voluntary long-form census. Some groups have indicated that they would like to see the data be more conclusive. These considerations will be taken into account when Statistics Canada and the government prepare the questions for the next long-form census. People will then be more used to the long form. Whatever questions they put on the mandatory form will address the concerns of the groups that feel this does not produce the data they require.

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