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CANADIAN HERITAGE
National Archival Development Program

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, June 13, 2013

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[*Translation*]

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NATIONAL ARCHIVAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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

A few months ago I asked a number of questions about the budget cuts to Library and Archives Canada, which would affect Canadians' access to their archival records.

The leader told me that Library and Archives Canada was going to expand its services through the development of new technologies. Apparently, Library and Archives Canada signed an agreement with Canadiana, a private organization, on a project to digitize archival content and set up a paywall.

Under the agreement, millions of images from hundreds of publicly owned collections will be digitized and Canadiana will be granted exclusive rights for the next 10 years. Canadiana intends to finance the project by charging Canadians for access to the digitized material.

Will the leader of the government confirm that Library and Archives Canada intends to expand its services by charging Canadians for access to publicly owned historical content that taxpayers have already paid for?

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, Library and Archives Canada is a large, independently run organization that receives roughly \$100 million of taxpayers' money annually. We do not think that Canadians should have to pay again for access to our historical content, and it is incumbent upon the Archives to proactively and transparently communicate any new projects to Canadians.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, when the government shut down the National Archival Development Program last year, we were told not to worry because Library and Archives Canada would be providing more services to Canadians online.

What the leader did not tell us was that, to compensate for the cuts, Library and Archives would have to outsource its work and hand over exclusive rights to publicly owned material, and that Canadians would have to pay to view the content. Much of this

content was bought by Library and Archives over the years with taxpayers' money.

Does the government think it is appropriate for Library and Archives to keep it out of the free public domain?

Senator LeBreton: I thank the senator for the question. I already made that clear in my first response. The minister, as Senator Tardif would know because he has been asked about this himself, will ask the new president to take another look at the National Archival Development Program to see if it can be restored in a way that makes sense within the current budget.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, if Library and Archives Canada is the guardian of an important good, why was the deal it was going to make with this private company not discussed? Why was it kept secret? Why was it not discussed publicly or at least with the librarian and archivist community groups who were not consulted and who are saying that the secret nature of the deal makes it impossible to know whether it is good for Canadians?

In the words of Vancouver archivist Myron Groover, if decisions are going to be taken, they need to be held in a spirit of openness, transparency and consultation so that Canadians and professionals can be assured it represents the best choice. Why was that not done?

Senator LeBreton: Again, honourable senators, I will state that we, as a government, do not believe that Canadians should have to pay again for access to our own historical documents, and it is incumbent upon Library and Archives Canada to proactively and transparently communicate any new projects to Canadians.

As I pointed out, Library and Archives Canada is a large, independently run organization. They are the ones who would have to answer as to why this information was not public.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, will the leader assure Canadians that they will not have to pay extra to have access to these archival materials that have been digitized? Is the leader making that commitment?

Senator LeBreton: I said that we do not think Canadians should have to pay again for access to our own historical data and that it is incumbent upon Library and Archives Canada to proactively and transparently communicate any new projects to Canadians.

I think with respect to Library and Archives Canada, which receives considerable taxpayers' dollars, as I just mentioned, it is pretty clear what the government's position on this is.