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## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

### Linguistic Duality

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

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[Translation]

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

#### LINGUISTIC DUALITY

**Hon. Claudette Tardif:** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. The latest report by the Commissioner of Official Languages indicates that the application of the Official Languages Act and linguistic duality have been undermined considerably. The report talks about the erosion of bilingualism in the public service because of the unintended consequences of budget cuts; the inability to receive service in one's language at airports; the elimination of the long-form census questionnaire, which will prevent federal institutions from taking measures adapted to the needs of official language minority communities; the utter failure regarding access to justice in French; a decline in bilingualism outside of Quebec; and so on.

How does the government plan on addressing these serious problems immediately?

**Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government):** I thank the Commissioner of Official Languages for his annual report.

We are proud of our government's unprecedented commitment to both official languages, our country's two national languages. We will continue to work on increasing opportunities for Canadians to learn both national languages and enhancing the vitality of our official language minority communities.

I am also pleased to see that the commissioner acknowledges the efforts made by Canadian Heritage and other federal institutions. I assure the honourable senator that we will continue in the same direction.

**Senator Tardif:** I have a supplementary question. In response to what I would call an appalling record, the Commissioner of Official Languages says that the government does not take the issue of language rights and the associated responsibilities seriously enough. I will quote the report:

Indeed, the federal government does not seem to place a high enough priority on linguistic duality as a Canadian value....When it comes to promoting linguistic duality, the federal government seems to be trailing behind the public instead of leading the way.

The government must do better to address the legitimate expectations of all Canadians.

What tangible steps will the government take to implement the Commissioner's recommendations?

• (1430)

**Senator Carignan:** We have already taken action with the Roadmap. As you know, Canada's official languages shaped our history and our identity, which is why the government adopted the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages. At approximately

\$1.1 billion, this is the most significant investment in official languages in our country's history.

As I have said before, the Roadmap supports both francophone and anglophone communities and focuses on three priorities: immigration, education and communities. We are proud to uphold this commitment to official language communities, and we will continue to work with various stakeholders to improve the promotion of our two official languages.

**Senator Tardif:** Of course, official language communities were pleased to see that the Roadmap was renewed, but we know that a large portion of the Roadmap is in fact recycled money, not new funding. We also know that a portion of the funding has been redirected to objectives other than linguistic duality. For example, the \$120 million for language training for immigrants serves economic purposes and helps newcomers learn English in provinces other than Quebec. That is an admirable goal, but it has nothing to do with strengthening our minority communities or improving bilingualism.

I want to come back to the issue of the public service. The Commissioner also stated that budget cuts have diminished the possibility that francophone public servants can exercise their right to work in their language. It is unacceptable for the government to save money by trampling on the language rights that are at the heart of Canadian identity.

What is the government going to do about this shameful step backward within the federal public service in order to ensure that government employees' right to use both official languages is respected?

**Senator Carignan:** At the beginning of your question, you spoke about immigration. I would like to remind you that, in 2012, Canada welcomed 3,685 francophone immigrants who settled into minority communities, which represents an increase of 4 per cent compared to 2011. Immigration is key to protecting the vitality and development of francophone communities outside Quebec.

As per the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, the Government of Canada, through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, is investing in language- and immigration-related initiatives. We are convinced that the Roadmap will contribute to promoting immigration and integrating immigrants. It will also help newcomers acquire the language skills needed to integrate into Canadian society.

With regard to the point you made about bilingualism in the federal public service, need I remind you that, in 2011, a survey of federal government employees showed that 92 per cent of them believe that they are able to work in the official language of their choice? Language training will continue to be offered to public servants who need it, and Canadians will continue to benefit from government services in the language of their choice, as always. We would like to thank the Commissioner for his report on official languages, particularly the part about the public service.