



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

---

2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 34

---

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Closure of Departmental Libraries

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### CLOSURE OF DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES

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

Over the past two years, the government has hastily closed down dozens of federal departmental libraries across the country without ensuring that vital records be digitized and without providing adequate resources to do that job or to assess the impact of these closures.

Let me remind honourable colleagues about the long list of libraries that have recently closed down: libraries at Canadian Heritage; libraries at Citizenship and Immigration; libraries at Environment Canada; libraries at Foreign Affairs; libraries at Employment and Social Development Canada; libraries at the National Capital Commission, Public Works and Government Services; libraries at Transport Canada; libraries at the Canada Revenue Agency; libraries at Fisheries and Oceans and Natural Resources Canada.

Federal libraries are an important part of Canada's cultural heritage. As Dr. Wells, a prominent researcher at the International Ocean Institute in Halifax, stated:

I see this situation as a national tragedy, done under the pretext of cost savings, which, when examined closely, will prove to be a false motive. A modern democratic society should value its information resources, not reduce, or worse, trash them.

Why? Why has the government failed to protect thousands of documents and the data that these libraries contained, thereby putting at risk our scientific heritage?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government):** I want to thank the honourable senator for her question. This gives me the opportunity to confirm to you that the information from the libraries is still available in digital form.

As you know, these days, digitizing information is the best way for employees and individuals to get the information they need. Employees across Canada will have greater access to information electronically, which we are currently making possible while saving taxpayers' money. Modern technology and document digitization make this a sound decision.

**Senator Tardif:** Allow me to read an account from a researcher who attended the dismantling of the Freshwater Institute library in Winnipeg:

What I saw was unbelievable. They opened the library and people were invited to take what they wanted from the shelves. I saw some leave with boxes full of old maps or old documents about plankton.... The government said that only duplicates of documents were handed out, but from

what I saw, no one was keeping track.... It made me sick to watch what was happening at that superb library.

Mr. Leader, that account is just one of many describing the chaotic dismantling of federal libraries and the loss of irreplaceable intellectual capital amassed over the years thanks to Canadian taxpayers. Scientists tell us that many documents ended up in the trash, were burned or were picked up by passers-by.

Will the government find out whether this destruction of Canadians' documentary heritage was done in accordance with the law?

**Senator Carignan:** As I said, we have decided to equip the government with 21st century technology because that is a wiser way to spend Canadians' money. Library users want digital information now. We know that because all of the libraries, including the fisheries one you mentioned, received an average of 5 to 12 visitors per year. Just to be clear, I did not say 5 to 12 visitors per day, but 5 to 12 visitors per year.

We sent lists of our duplicate documents to many groups so that they could add to their own collections, and we have been assured that Canadians can rest easy. The complete collection is available both on paper and digitally.

**Senator Tardif:** Canadian researchers have expressed their consternation at the closure of 7 of Fisheries and Oceans' 11 science libraries. A 12-page memo made public last December through an access to information request indicates that the sole purpose of closing this library is to save \$443,000, which is not a lot of money.

• (1440)

How can the government justify the loss of this priceless scientific heritage?

**Senator Carignan:** Honourable senators, I believe that I clearly stated that library users want digital information and that this information is still available. We sent lists of our duplicate documents to many groups so they could add them to their collections. I have been told that Canadians can rest assured that the complete collection is available.

Libraries will continue to provide services in both official languages. The Commissioner of Official Languages acknowledged that the model adopted by Fisheries and Oceans' scientific libraries will not affect services to the public or the language of work.

**Senator Tardif:** I would like to read other accounts by current employees and scientists that contradict the information provided to you by the Prime Minister's Office:

[*English*]

The department has claimed that all useful information from the closed libraries is available in digital form. This is simply not true. Much of the material is lost forever....

The cuts were carried out in great haste, apparently in order to meet some unknown agenda. No records have been provided with regard to what material has been dumped or the value of the public property. No formal attempt was made to transfer material to libraries of existing academic institutions.

[*Translation*]

Can the Leader give us details about how the government decided which documents would be kept and which ones would be discarded? I would also like to know if librarians and users were consulted.

**Senator Carignan:** As I explained, we have undertaken to provide the government with 21st century technologies in order to spend the taxpayers' dollars more wisely. Library users want digital information.

I explained it and I will say it again: We sent lists of our duplicate documents to many groups so they could add them to their collections. Canadians have nothing to worry about: the complete collection of these scientific documents is available.

I don't think anyone can criticize this government for digitizing the documents so that they can reach a wider audience.

---