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## STUDY ON CBC/RADIO-CANADA'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT AND THE BROADCASTING ACT

Third Report of Official Languages Committee and  
Request for Government Response—  
Debate Adjourned

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, May 6, 2014

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[Translation]

### STUDY ON CBC/RADIO-CANADA'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT AND THE BROADCASTING ACT

THIRD REPORT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES  
COMMITTEE AND REQUEST FOR  
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE—  
DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled: *CBC/Radio-Canada's Language Obligations, Communities Want to See Themselves and Be Heard Coast to Coast!*, tabled in the Senate on April 8, 2014.

**Hon. Claudette Tardif:** Honourable senators, I move:

That the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *CBC/Radio-Canada's Language Obligations, Communities Want to See Themselves and Be Heard Coast to Coast!*, tabled in the Senate on Tuesday, April 8, 2014, be adopted and that, pursuant to rule 12-24(1), the Senate requests a complete and detailed response from the government, with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages being identified as the minister responsible for responding to the report.

Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion to approve the report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled: *CBC/Radio-Canada's Language Obligations, Communities Want to See Themselves and Be Heard Coast to Coast!*, tabled in the Senate on April 8, 2014.

If I may, I would like to share with you a few highlights from this report, which was unanimously adopted by the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages.

First, I would like to thank my honourable colleagues, Senator Champagne, the committee's deputy chair, and Senator Fortin-Duplessis, both members of the steering committee, for the vital role they played in drafting the report.

I would also like to draw attention to the significant contribution of Senator Chaput, who initiated this study when she was chair, and the invaluable contribution of all the senators who helped with this study. I would also like to commend the remarkable work of our analyst, Marie-Ève Hudon, and the clerks, Danielle Labonté and Daniel Charbonneau. I would like to thank the CBC/Radio-Canada representatives who cooperated with us throughout the study. All the members of the committee express their gratitude and appreciation to the witnesses who agreed to share their experiences, their knowledge and their suggestions.

In the fall of 2011, the members of the committee undertook a study on CBC/Radio-Canada's obligations under the Official Languages Act and some specific aspects of the Broadcasting Act.

Your committee had previously conducted a number of studies on the issue. However, this was the first time that the committee took an in-depth look at the key role that this federal institution plays in the advancement of Canada's linguistic duality and the development of official language minority communities.

The report is divided into three chapters. The first chapter defines CBC/Radio-Canada's language obligations under the Broadcasting Act and the Official Languages Act. The second chapter summarizes the key arguments of the witnesses who appeared before the Senate committee. The third chapter sets out the Senate committee's findings with regard to the public broadcaster's respect for language obligations and presents 12 recommendations to CBC/Radio-Canada and the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages on what improvements are needed.

In making its recommendations, the Senate committee first considered the conditions of licence recently issued to the Corporation by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. It then highlighted the importance for the Corporation to act in the spirit of the Official Languages Act.

More than 40 witnesses (represented by 81 spokespersons) gave testimony at public hearings. As a result, the committee was able to obtain a realistic and complete picture of the situation in all regions of the country.

The Senate committee's study examined various issues, such as the offer of services in English and in French, reflection of regional diversity, communications with the public and measures to enhance the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities and advance linguistic duality. The study highlighted the concerns and expectations of a number of stakeholders with regard to CBC/Radio-Canada's language obligations. All the witnesses who appeared before the committee said that they believe in the importance of the services provided by the public broadcaster.

Honourable senators, one thing that everyone agreed on during this study is that CBC/Radio-Canada plays a key role in supporting the development and enhancing the vitality of official language minority communities. The corporation is considered to be essential to the development of communities in two ways: it provides a vital French presence and forms partnerships with community members.

To illustrate the importance of a vital French presence, the president of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française pointed out that:

...the Canadian francophonie cannot survive, grow and thrive unless it is heard, seen and experienced.

In some places in Canada, Radio-Canada is the only French news media available, whether on television or radio. Under such circumstances, there can be no doubt that the public broadcaster's presence is considered essential. All of the witnesses who spoke on behalf of francophone and Acadian communities recognized that

the corporation plays a critical role in maintaining a French presence across the country. Radio-Canada also plays a role in bringing communities together. According to the witnesses, it promotes key partnerships across many sectors, such as arts and culture, that directly affect the development of official language minority communities.

Unfortunately, CBC/Radio-Canada still falls short of expectations. The same complaints are made year after year: the broadcaster must provide an increased presence in the regions and has to do more to fully meet its language obligations. Even though the public broadcaster has made progress over the years, it still has many challenges in terms of official languages.

This study finds that CBC/Radio-Canada must take urgent action in order not to hinder the development of official language minority communities. Any cuts to services could have a negative impact on their survival and vitality in the long term.

Communities unanimously expressed their desire to see, hear and read about themselves on radio and television. Coverage of local events by journalists, reporters and video journalists in the regions was cited many times as being important to ensuring that the realities of official language minority communities are reflected not just in the regions but also at the national level and on all platforms. The failure to reflect the regional diversity of francophones across the country on national programs broadcast in prime time was one of the strongest criticisms.

Consequently, CBC/Radio-Canada must demonstrate that its decision-making process, its mechanisms for consultation and accountability and its programming take into account the needs of communities.

Honourable senators, here are a few of the 12 recommendations made by the committee:

- (1600)

According to the conditions of licence issued by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and in the spirit of the Official Languages Act, the committee recommends:

That CBC/Radio-Canada take concrete and positive measures to enable all francophones across Canada to see, hear and read about themselves in French.

That CBC/Radio-Canada ensure that all anglophones and francophones are offered programming of equivalent quality in all regions of Canada. CBC/Radio-Canada must be a leader in promoting linguistic duality.

That said, several witnesses noted significant differences in organizational culture between the French and English networks. They brought up the notion of the two solitudes. I would like to quote the president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, who also brought up the notion of the two solitudes:

This commitment to linguistic duality applies just as much to CBC as it does to Radio-Canada. But the fact that there are still two solitudes in a number of regions cannot be denied. When it comes to the CBC, it is as though our communities do not exist, most of the time. And yet, if ever we had an ideal agent to build bridges and foster a better

understanding between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians, it is indeed CBC/Radio-Canada.

That is also the opinion of our colleague, former Senator Pierre De Bané, who had the opportunity on several occasions and at various forums to share his thoughts on the CBC's failure to "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity."

An important point that was raised during the public hearings is that French-language services in Northern Canada are very limited. When the Association franco-yukonnaise appeared before the CRTC, the representative said:

There is a clear imbalance between the services provided in English and French in the Canadian North. Because of the very structure of CBC/Radio-Canada, the situation is not comparable. On the English side, CBC North broadcasts programs for the North produced by people from the North for a northern audience. On the French side, there is no SRC North, no specific budget, no office and no proper programs. This region of the country quite simply does not exist in French.

In my province, Alberta, CBC/Radio-Canada's French radio signal is not available in Jasper National Park whereas the English signal is.

The Executive Director of the English Language Arts Network pointed out a specific case of a community that did not have access to CBC's regional signal. He was talking about the community of Wakefield, near the Ontario border. He said:

One ongoing problem with CBC is that the entire Ontario border receives the service from Ontario. Communities like Wakefield do not get a signal from Quebec so they feel completely isolated from the rest of the community.

Your committee also recommends that CBC/Radio-Canada immediately increase opportunities for collaboration between its English and French networks and that the board of directors share its collaboration plan with the Senate committee by December 31, 2014. The Senate committee believes that, since the corporation has anglophone and francophone counterparts, it embodies linguistic duality and must ensure that it acts as an ambassador for this principle, as set out in Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

**The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*:** Is it agreed that we will give Senator Tardif five more minutes?

**Some Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Senator Tardif:** It is important for CBC/Radio-Canada to increase opportunities for collaboration between its two networks and foster a common understanding of its language obligations. Based on the testimony the committee heard, it seems clear that the current mechanisms for dialogue between the two networks are flawed.

The committee recommends that CBC/Radio-Canada commit to reflecting the regional diversity and realities of official language minority communities in its national programming, during prime time, by promoting greater collaboration between its regional stations and its national network and facilitating exchanges from one station to another, one platform to another — radio, television and the Internet — and one network to the other.

The committee recommends that CBC/Radio-Canada demonstrate how feedback from consultations with official language minority communities was taken into consideration in its decision-making process and that the board of directors notify the Senate committee of action taken by December 31, 2014. Many witnesses called for changes to existing consultation mechanisms and the corporate culture so that the corporation is more aware of the needs of official language minority communities.

Over the course of the public hearings, official language minority communities called for the creation of a formal consultation mechanism that reflects the obligations set out in Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

Your committee also recommends that CBC/Radio-Canada commit to reflecting the artistic and cultural talents of anglophone and francophone minority communities in its national programming, during prime time, across all of its platforms — including radio, television and the Internet. The public broadcaster must showcase many francophone and anglophone artists in Canada. The president of the *Fédération culturelle canadienne française* described how CBC/Radio-Canada contributes to independent producers as follows:

The partnerships with independent producers are also beneficial to the development of the entire Franco-Canadian cultural industry, and particularly to the development of television production. Moreover, these partnerships help us to keep artists and cultural workers in our communities and prevent the exodus of talent to the large centres, an issue that is particularly problematic in the Canadian francophone community.

Your committee recommends that the Government of Canada, through the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, provide targeted financial assistance to CBC/Radio-Canada so that it can continue to support local production in

official language minority communities after August 31, 2014. Let's not forget, honourable senators, that in 2012, the CRTC decided to phase out funding until August 31, 2014, which represents a loss of \$47.1 million to CBC/Radio-Canada.

The Senate committee recognizes that eliminating funding for improving local programming could have a devastating impact on official language minority communities.

• (1610)

The witnesses who appeared before the Senate committee were unanimous in saying that support for local programming was key to enhancing the vitality of official language minority communities.

Honourable senators, in light of recent events, from budget cuts to demographic changes, the development of new technologies to the realities of an increasingly competitive market, your committee is aware that the public broadcaster is facing significant challenges. However, as a federal institution, CBC/Radio-Canada is required to meet its obligations under the Official Languages Act.

Honourable senators, we believe that, in light of the testimony, CBC/Radio-Canada must work much harder to meet its official language obligations. The recommendations in this report are aimed at improving the situation, without delay. The Senate committee will very closely monitor the public broadcaster's actions in light of the recommendations in its report. The tagline "ICI Radio-Canada" must reflect everyone in Canada in every way.

Honourable senators, I therefore strongly recommend that you support this motion and adopt the report.

(On motion of Senator Fortin-Duplessis, debate adjourned.)

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