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INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ROBOTICS

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, March 30, 2017

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[*Translation*]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Hon. Claudette Tardif: The independent Liberal senators regularly invite all parliamentarians and the general public to discuss various issues with groups of subject-matter experts during their open caucuses.

The most recent of those discussions was held yesterday, March 29, on the subject of robotics and artificial intelligence. Specifically, we talked about how to foster innovation, set ethics parameters and maximize the social benefits of integrating robotics and artificial intelligence.

Leader, what is the Government of Canada doing to manage the integration of robotics and artificial intelligence into Canadian society, particularly with regard to innovation, job creation and ethics?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Harder (Government Representative in the Senate): I want to thank the honourable senator for her question.

Before I answer the question, I want to acknowledge the innovation of the open caucuses, as they have given all senators the occasion to hear from a more broadly representative group of Canadians on specific subjects. I can't think of a more interesting and timely subject than artificial intelligence, and I would note that it parallels the work being done by our Social Affairs Committee on this important subject, although the committee is looking at it more on the health care side.

You will know from the budget itself that there is significant investment in artificial intelligence specifically. The centres of excellence are referenced in the document, and I believe \$125 million is attached to that, but there is also related innovation funding that will take advantage of developments in

artificial intelligence, particularly in strengthening the clusters in Montreal, Toronto and Edmonton that are emerging as world-class platforms for the way in which artificial intelligence can inform and innovate many sectors, not just research itself.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: Thank you for your answer. I believe that the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications is currently studying the issue of robotics as it relates to cars.

We know that the budget includes investments in innovation; however, the experts we heard from yesterday believe that a national roadmap is needed to better govern the considerable and rapid technological changes on the horizon. The experts pointed to several European countries that have established such a roadmap.

Leader, does the government intend to make up for lost time by putting forward a comprehensive vision addressing all the challenges and opportunities in this field?

[*English*]

Senator Harder: Again, let me thank the honourable senator for her question and acknowledge that in a federation like Canada, it works best when the federal government is working cooperatively, particularly in the area of innovation and economic development, with its partners at the provincial level and, indeed, in some sectors at the local levels.

The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development has rejuvenated the federal-provincial working group. In fact, there is now a very active federal-provincial coordination of innovation programming. The desire of the Government of Canada is to simplify its own programs, and that was referenced in the budget, to ensure that there is appropriate and easy access of programming from Canadians that take advantage of the innovation investments.

I will undertake to bring the minister up to date on the open caucus that your caucus has sponsored this week.