



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

---

2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 156

---

## STUDY ON BEST PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE POLICIES AND SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CONTEXT OF LINGUISTIC DUALITY OR PLURALITY

Sixth Report of Official Languages Committee and Request for  
Government Response Adopted

Speech by:

The Honourable Joan Fraser  
on behalf of  
The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Friday, June 19, 2015

## THE SENATE

Friday, June 19, 2015

[Translation]

### STUDY ON BEST PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE POLICIES AND SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CONTEXT OF LINGUISTIC DUALITY OR PLURALITY

SIXTH REPORT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES  
COMMITTEE AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT  
RESPONSE ADOPTED

**Hon. Joan Fraser (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, as you know, the chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages had to step out. However, before leaving the chamber, she asked me to read her speech on this report. Pardon my accent, but this Claudette Tardif speaking now.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the contribution of Senator Fortin-Duplessis, deputy chair of the committee. Her determination to promote bilingualism for young Canadians is what drove the committee to undertake this major study.

Senator Tardif goes on to thank the same people that Senator Fortin-Duplessis thanked: the members of the committee, the staff members, who are excellent, as well as the witnesses. I will continue with Senator Tardif's speech.

In the spring of 2013, members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages undertook their study of the best practices for language policies and second-language learning. We know that many countries have systems that recognize two or more official languages.

Taking into account changing sociodemographic realities and the increasingly apparent desire to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, the committee chose to examine Canada's practices, policies and systems for the promotion of official languages and official-language learning.

This report provides an overview of French second-language education outside Quebec and English second-language education in Quebec.

In 2011-12, 2.4 million young Canadians were learning English or French as a second language in elementary and secondary schools across the country. Beginning in 2011, Quebec introduced pilot projects for intensive English instruction in grades five and six. In addition, 62,000 students participated in intensive French programs outside Quebec. Nearly 350,000 young anglophones were enrolled in French immersion programs in all Canadian provinces.

[English]

Although the numbers are on the rise for specialized programs, the proportion of students in public schools enrolled in a core French program has decreased compared with 20 years earlier, dropping from 53 per cent in 1991 to 44 per cent in 2011.

[Translation]

This decline is of course very worrisome. The Senate committee also deplores the shrinking proportion of young Canadians who can carry on conversations in French and in English. In 2011, 22.6 per cent of young Canadians aged 15 to 19 had some knowledge of both official languages, but that represents a decline. From 2001 to 2011, that figure dropped from 23.9 per cent to 22.6 per cent.

We have to take that decline very seriously. The findings of that study enabled the committee to identify obstacles to the growth of bilingualism in Canada and to present recommendations to increase the rate of bilingualism in our country.

There are a number of challenges to be overcome, including the lack of equal access to second-language instruction programs; the lack of educational resources; the shortage of teachers and the lack of support for their training; the absence of a common Canadian framework for second-language instruction; access to programs and the fact that immigrants' needs are often overlooked when French-as-a-second-language programs are implemented.

To improve the situation, the committee made 10 recommendations to the federal government, divided into four specific areas: active promotion of bilingualism, increased official-language proficiency, innovative practices and funding.

[English]

Immediate action is needed on two fronts. First, second-language programs must be made accessible to everyone everywhere. To do so, the federal government must encourage the public and the business community to foster the recognition and use of the two official languages, and it must launch a national awareness campaign to encourage Canadians to learn their two official languages.

[Translation]

We then need to set clear and ambitious targets for the future in order to increase official language proficiency, especially among Canadians between the ages of 15 and 19, by 2018.

Canadian Heritage must take a leadership role in convincing its provincial and territorial counterparts to adopt a specific national target. There should be discussions with the main stakeholders: language organizations, school boards and teachers. The target would set measurable objectives to be attained by 2018, the year when the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages expires.

The committee is of the opinion that the federal government must actively promote bilingualism, increase awareness of the advantages of bilingualism and act as a champion to ensure that all partners develop a

pan-Canadian strategy to promote official-language learning.

In light of the testimony we heard, this strategy could take a number of approaches: ensuring access everywhere and for everyone to courses in either official language; promoting the second-language teaching profession; supporting post-secondary institutions in providing more French-language programs; and adopting a common Canadian framework of reference for languages linked to teaching, learning and evaluating language proficiency in Canada.

A major factor in motivating students to stay in school would be to increase the number of exchange programs for students and teachers. We need to encourage innovative practices based on new teaching approaches. The government must play an active role by supporting research based on innovative practices, as well as sharing results, offering fair and sustainable funding, and improving accountability.

Throughout our study in committee, the witnesses told us that bilingualism provides numerous social, economic and cognitive advantages, and that it represents an asset that all Canadians should be able to take advantage of.

The committee thinks it is important to immediately take measures to improve the status and equality of Canada's

official languages. There is no doubt that a Canada with a more bilingual population would also have a stronger global presence.

• (1320)

The Canadian Teachers' Federation believes that:

Learning French outside of Quebec is part of our country's national identity. Learning French is something more than simply learning another language for oneself. It is part of a larger project that is essential for our country as a whole.

Honourable senators, as the 150th anniversary of Confederation approaches, Canada must take steps to ensure that bilingualism regains its rightful place as a fundamental value across the country. I strongly recommend supporting this motion and adopting this report. Thank you.

That was the end of Senator Tardif's speech. I too would like to add a few words and congratulate Senator Fortin-Duplessis on the work she has done here and throughout her career. I wish her a wonderful, happy and active retirement.

Good luck.

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

---