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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Canada Periodical Fund

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

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THE SENATE

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[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

CANADA PERIODICAL FUND

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, a few weeks ago, Senator Chaput and I asked questions in this chamber about the Canada Periodical Fund. We were told, both orally and in writing, that cuts had not been made to the overall program. I understand that funding for the program was maintained, but that was not the question.

Rather, the question pertains to the new formula being used by this program, which penalizes newspapers serving a specific readership that is scattered across a large geographic area, for example, *Le Franco* in Alberta, *La Liberté* in Manitoba and *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse* in Nova Scotia. These newspapers have experienced major cuts under this formula. I am bringing this up again because the Minister of Canadian Heritage has still not responded to the requests for meetings from the editors of these newspapers.

Could the leader tell us why the minister is refusing to address the real problem, which is a funding formula that penalizes newspapers serving minority francophone communities?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the senator for the question. As she indicated, we did table a written response to her questions to me of a few weeks ago. Official languages minority publications have special eligibility exemptions under the Canada Periodical Fund. This is has not changed. Publications are receiving more support than ever before under this program created by our government.

Our goal when we strengthened this program, as I believe I mentioned when I responded to this before, was to make it clear that we supported magazines providing readers with more quality stories and opinions and in the magazines of their choice. The government's policy has not changed on minority language publications, and the answer that I provided to the honourable senator stands.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question. Some newspapers could potentially receive more

funding. I do not know anything about that. However, what I do know is that French-language publications in Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia may have to close their doors because of the changes that the Conservative government has made to their method of funding. These newspapers are pillars of the francophone minority communities they serve. The government has a responsibility to implement measures to support the development of these communities under the Official Languages Act.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage at least meet with the managers of the affected newspapers to discuss their concerns? How much longer is it going to take him to respond to the requests made by these newspapers?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I of course can speak for the government but not for individual ministers. I will make the honourable senator's concerns known to Minister Moore. That is all I can do at the moment.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: This measure is raising concerns even among the ranks of the Conservative government. In a letter addressed to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, James Moore, the Conservative member for Saint-Boniface, Shelly Glover, indicated that she is deeply concerned. She wrote, "I am afraid that, if targeted action to help newspapers like *La Liberté* is not taken, some publications will be forced to shut down. I can assure you that the death of a French-language newspaper that is about to celebrate its 100th anniversary — especially if that death is caused by Conservatives — will leave an indelible black mark on our government . . ."

What does the Conservative government plan to do to address this situation?

• (1410)

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Thank you. Of course, I did read the article that the honourable senator referred to, which concerned my colleague, Shelly Glover. I cannot specifically provide an answer, but as I indicated a moment ago, I will draw the issues that the honourable senator has raised here in the Senate to the attention of Minister Moore so that he is aware of her concerns.