



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Promoting Linguistic Duality

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

## THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

#### PROMOTING LINGUISTIC DUALITY

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. In 2005, the Parliament of Canada amended Part VII of the Official Languages Act, thereby making it mandatory for all federal institutions to promote English and French.

At that time, the Clerk of the Privy Council wrote to the chief executives of those institutions, calling on them to familiarize themselves with their new obligations under Part VII and to ensure compliance.

That was over five years ago. According to the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages tabled today, several federal institutions assessed in 2010 and 2011 showed a very poor understanding of their obligations under Part VII.

Indeed, too many institutions still believe that that part of the act does not apply to them. Madam Leader, governing the country requires initiative.

• (1430)

In order to govern, you must demonstrate leadership. Above all, you must set an example. The government must clearly affirm the importance it places on this part of the Act and the resulting obligations.

According to the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, it is obvious that the government is not exercising the leadership required to implement Part VII of the act. Can the Leader of the Government in the Senate perhaps tell us why this is the case?

[*English*]

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government):** I disagree with the premise of the honourable senator's question. We have taken great steps as a government in implementing Part VII. We,

of course, thank the Commissioner of Official Languages for his report, which was made public today.

As I have stated many times before, the government strongly supports the linguistic duality of our country, and we have delivered on that commitment and support. Under this government we have already taken steps, as I mentioned, to improve the implementation of Part VII of the act. We have increased the number of institutions that report on their official language obligations from 30 to 200. To use the commissioner's own words, "definite progress is being made" in many government departments.

I think there is still work to do, honourable senators, but it is quite incorrect to state that we have not made great strides in this area.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Tardif:** The government has not undertaken any major initiatives. Nor has it brought forward an action plan for all federal institutions that would help them fully understand the importance of the implementation of Part VII of the act. Many of the institutions have still not introduced positive measures to foster the development of official language communities and promote Canada's linguistic duality. There are discrepancies between some of the federal departments and institutions.

Will the government again undertake to establish an action plan and to coordinate implementation of the Commissioner's recommendation, that Treasury Board should have the power and authority needed to move forward with the implementation of Part VII of the act?

[*English*]

**Senator LeBreton:** Honourable senators, the government has a solid record of fostering a good plan to implement Part VII. As I stated in my first answer, to improve from 30 institutions to 200 shows that this is working, although there are still improvements to be made.

I have not had a chance to read the Official Language Commissioner's report in depth, so I will simply take as notice the suggestion with regard to the role that Treasury Board may play.