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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Express Entry—Francophone Immigration

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, February 5, 2015

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

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EXPRESS ENTRY—FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. On January 1, Citizenship and Immigration Canada launched the Express Entry system to recruit economic immigrants. Under this system, eligible candidates such as skilled workers in specialty trades can apply to have their economic profile placed in the Express Entry pool, which employers then consult to select candidates who meet their companies' needs. However, the Express Entry system does not promote francophone minority communities to francophone immigrants. Marie-France Kenny, president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et Acadienne deplorés the fact that there is no incentive for francophone and anglophone employers in our communities to hire bilingual or francophone newcomers.

In light of the government's commitment to comply with the Official Languages Act and take positive measures to support the development of official language minority communities, how is it that the government has implemented a system that does not take the specific needs of those communities into account?

Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government): Senator, as you said, we are committed to promoting francophone immigration across Canada through our permanent immigration program. Starting on January 1, applications are to be processed in six months or less, under the Express Entry program, as you said. It is my understanding that the minister has taken part in numerous consultations to see how we can attract the best and brightest francophone immigrants, which will help Canada meet its workforce and economic needs.

Senator Tardif: I must repeat that the new Express Entry system does not include a francophone lens in order to promote francophone communities outside Quebec. Furthermore, last fall, the government cancelled the Francophone Significant Benefit Program, which was highly beneficial to francophone immigration.

As you know, francophone immigration is crucial to the development and vitality of francophone minority communities.

How does the government plan to modify the Express Entry system to ensure that it meets the needs of francophone minority communities? When will those measures be implemented?

• (1400)

Senator Carignan: Senator, as I said, the minister participated in numerous consultations to find ways of attracting the brightest francophone immigrants to help us meet our workforce and economic needs.

For example, we have doubled the number of francophone permanent residents, particularly in Manitoba, since we took office. In the last five years of the Liberal government, 437 francophone immigrants settled in Manitoba. During the five first years of our government, we welcomed 861 francophone immigrants to Manitoba. More recently, from 2011 to 2013, we brought in 835 francophone newcomers to Manitoba.

We have taken concrete action and we have gotten concrete results.

Senator Tardif: Mr. Leader, you say that there was a consultation. However, Ms. Kennedy said the following about the Express Entry program, and I quote:

This was announced two years ago, and for two years we've been asking to be there, and it took two years before we were able to meet them. The longer it takes, the more our communities suffer.

On February 2, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced that 779 skilled workers, including professionals in natural and applied sciences, and industrial, electrical and construction trades, were invited to apply for permanent residency in Canada. Each of these candidates declared that they already had a valid job offer or provincial nomination.

Mr. Leader, could you tell us how many francophones there are among these 779 skilled workers? How many francophone candidates are included in that figure?

Senator Carignan: That is a very specific and technical question. If you don't mind, I will take your question as notice and get back to you later.