



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### International Mobility Program

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, June 4, 2015

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[Translation]

### EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

#### INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY PROGRAM

**Hon. Claudette Tardif:** Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. The new rules that the government has imposed, without notice, on people who want to immigrate to Canada do not just affect temporary foreign workers. They also affect hundreds of foreign students. Thousands of internships for foreign students in Canada are in jeopardy because of a new directive imposed by the federal government, which is making things difficult for the companies that bring interns to Canada.

Effective February 21, 2015, companies that want to hire foreign interns have to pay a fee of \$230 per intern and fill out a long online form. The government is trying to discourage organizations that want to hire foreign workers under its International Mobility Program. Mr. Leader, why is the government choosing to reduce the number of foreign interns in Canada and make life difficult for the small businesses and community organizations that could use their help?

**Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government):** As you know, senator, we have a system to manage applications from foreign workers. This system also applies to students in certain cases and certain circumstances. When it comes to choosing candidates, we give priority to Canadian workers, and then to people who have work experience in Canada or who are participating in the Provincial Nominee Program. Priority is given to post-secondary students who have work experience in Canada or who have acquired the skills needed to work in either of the two official languages. We have a series of requirements based on the different situations of the immigrants or foreign workers that enable us to optimize the use of resources.

**Senator Tardif:** Leader, this is not about taking a job away from a Canadian worker. This is about unpaid internships. According to Judith Laurier, Director of Communications for the Fédération des cégeps, half of the 200 non-profits in Quebec that have previously sponsored foreign interns will not be able to do so this year. France's Association des Directeurs d'Instituts de Technologie has indicated that it will be forced to choose other countries for its students. I would like to quote Ms. Laurier:

That puts us in an awkward position. We are concerned that other French institutions will follow suit and end their collaboration with Canada. Also, if the French institutions start questioning the Canada-France agreement, that will jeopardize the positions of the interns we send to them.

How will the government address the situation of our Canadian students who run the risk of losing out on wonderful opportunities for international internships?

**Senator Carignan:** Senator, as I said, we have put in place measures to give top priority to Canadians when it comes to jobs. Furthermore, we have implemented measures that promote

professional opportunities for Canadian and foreign students. We will ensure that these measures strike the right balance between the right of Canadians to find employment in Canada and the ability of employers to find skilled workers.

**Senator Tardif:** These new rules threaten a historic agreement between Quebec and France, which results in exchanges for hundreds of interns every year. More than 1,000 internships for French students in Quebec are affected by the government's changes. Hundreds of Quebec interns in France are also caught up in this dispute. Allow me to quote a resolution of the Association des Directeurs d'Instituts Universitaires de Technologie, which comprises 113 institutes in France:

These lockout measures threaten the relationship between the IUT and Canadian institutions in the long term. The Association finds it unfortunate that the rules for the issuing of international co-op visas for students from France have been changed in the middle of the academic year, without any information or prior notice from Canadian authorities.

French interns need this experience in order to obtain their degrees, and changing the rules just a few weeks before their departure is unacceptable. Leader, how does the government intend to solve this problem?

**Senator Carignan:** The programs are created using the Express Entry system, which manages the applications related to programs for skilled workers, skilled tradespersons and provincial nominees. These programs have not changed at all. The requirements remain the same. With the Express Entry system, only those candidates who are most likely to succeed — not just the first to apply — can present as candidates for immigration to Canada. As for the issue of selection based on skills, that is done based on needs and the students' qualifications. We take into account the labour needs in order to increase the competitiveness of Canadian businesses while serving the interests of Canadians first.

**Senator Tardif:** Leader, I thought that attracting more international students was one of the government's objectives. Why, then, did the government go ahead and reform how temporary foreign workers are hired, when those reforms make it harder and more complicated for Canadian businesses to offer internships to students who want to come to Canada, and for our students who want to go elsewhere? This is not to mention the fact that those countries will turn to other countries besides Canada.

**Senator Carignan:** I think it is important to encourage immigration that respects the government's parameters and objectives. You are probably referring more specifically to francophone immigration. The minister was very clear about the 4 per cent target for francophone immigration outside Quebec. Our government developed a plan to achieve that target and we are seeing tangible results with the Express Entry program. I know that the commissioner made some recommendations regarding francophone immigration. Rest assured that we took note of those and that we will continue to work on achieving these objectives.