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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

CONFERENCE INTERPRETATION SERVICES— AUTOMATED PROCUREMENT SYSTEM

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

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CONFERENCE INTERPRETATION SERVICES— AUTOMATED PROCUREMENT SYSTEM

Hon. Claudette Tardif: The government plans to implement a new procurement system for conference interpretation services on October 31. At present, this system is designed to choose the lowest bidder in an area where highly specialized services are required. Choosing the lowest bidder is acceptable for office supplies or car rentals. However, Canada's official languages are far too important and we should not be bound by a single parameter.

Minister, why is the government insisting on moving forward with this new automated procurement system, which opens the door to eliminating the criterion of world-class international accreditation standards and jeopardizes our national and international reputation?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you for the question. No government considers official languages more important or thinks more highly of doing the right thing when it comes to the two official languages than this Government of Canada.

I can tell you that we have worked very hard; we're very committed. We looked very closely at all of the considerations of the Standing Committee on Official Languages and carefully reviewed all of the recommendations. We are committed to making sure that we do everything we possibly can, that we focus very thoroughly on making sure that we have the right translation system in place and that we adhere to what is expected of us as a government. We're doing just that. With our Translation Bureau and our comprehension tool, we're committed to making sure that that is the first-class standard that it can possibly be in terms of dealing with information that parliamentarians and departments of government need.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: I am certain that no one wants to again experience problems such as those created by the new translation tool, Portage, and the Phoenix pay system. This afternoon, you answered questions about this mechanism. Would you be prepared to stop the implementation of this new procurement system, which could compromise the quality of conference interpretation services just to reduce costs? Would you agree, Minister, to halt the implementation of this new system?

[*English*]

Ms. Foote: Honourable senators, I give my commitment that we will make sure that everything that can possibly be done to ensure we have the quality system that is needed will be done.