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News Release

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, July 14, 2016

For immediate release

Senate report to shape next-generation bilingualism policy

Ottawa – A Senate report on bilingualism will lay the foundation for the federal government’s new official languages plan.

But the government has so far not committed more money for second-language instruction — a key recommendation of the Senate Committee on Official Languages’ June 2015 report called *Aiming Higher: Increasing bilingualism of our Canadian youth*.

Earlier this year, senators passed a motion requesting a government response to the committee’s in-depth report.

In its response, the government said it “supports the general thrust of the report.”

“The work of the Committee will enhance the thinking process for future approaches to the preparation of a new official-languages plan,” the response said. “The approaches identified will also be included in future discussions with provincial and territorial governments so that progress can be made towards the major objective of increasing bilingualism in Canada.”

Nevertheless, the government refused to commit to releasing more money for second-language instruction.

The response notes that funding outlined in the Protocol for Agreements between the Government of Canada and Provincial/Territorial Governments for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction has stagnated at 2009 levels. While negotiations for a new Protocol are slated to begin next year, the government response said only that it “understands the importance” attached to federal funding.

Senators intend to invite Minister of Canadian Heritage Mélanie Joly to appear before the committee to better understand what actions the government intends to take to improve bilingualism in Canada.

The committee will also build on its report with fact-finding missions to Vancouver and Victoria in October to better understand the challenges of accessing French-language schools and French immersion programs in British Columbia. This new report is to be tabled in December.

Quick Facts

- The committee made 10 recommendations in its June 2015 report, including:
 - Increasing support for official-language promotion and learning,

- Establishing a national framework of reference for language teaching, learning and evaluation,
 - Improving accountability practices, and
 - Establishing a specific, measurable objective to increase official-language proficiency among Canadians, particularly youth.
- Since 2009 the federal government has committed to provide \$259.5 million each year for second-language instruction, including \$24 million for Canada-wide scholarship programs and \$234.5 million for provincial and territorial action plans.
 - As of last year, approximately 2.4 million young Canadians are learning English or French as a second language in elementary and secondary schools.

Quotes

“The committee is happy that the federal government will make use of our report in drafting a new official languages plan. But given the broad support our report has received we would have preferred to see the government make specific commitments, particularly in regard to the promotion and teaching of Canada’s official languages. We believe the government can do better.”

- **Senator Claudette Tardif, Chair of the committee.**

“Strong financial support is essential to enhancing bilingualism in Canada. As the 150th anniversary of Confederation draws near, we urge the government to show its commitment to bilingualism in Canada by putting its money where its mouth is.”

- **Senator Rose-May Poirier, Deputy Chair of the committee.**

Associated Links

Click to see the committee’s report, [*Aiming Higher: Increasing bilingualism of our Canadian youth*](#) and to see [*an infographic of official language learning*](#) among Canadian youth.

Click to read the full text of [*the government’s response*](#) to the committee’s report.

Click to [*visit the committee’s website*](#).

The Senate is on Twitter [*@SenateCA*](#); follow the committee’s activities using the hashtag **#OLLO**.

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