



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

2nd SESSION

• 39th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 144

• NUMBER 67

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Report of Commissioner—Action Plan

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

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REPORT OF COMMISSIONER—ACTION PLAN

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Graham Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages, was very harsh in his latest annual report, criticizing the government for its lack of leadership:

The government continues to support Canada's linguistic duality in principle; however, this support has not led to a global vision in terms of government policies and the public service. This lack of leadership has resulted in a plateau being reached and, in some cases, a deterioration in the application of the official languages policy.

When will the government show some leadership in protecting and promoting linguistic rights by creating an organizational culture of respect for the use of official languages in all federal departments and agencies, by reinstating the Court Challenges Program, and by agreeing to appoint bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada?

These are concrete examples. When will the government show the leadership illustrated by these examples?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, I have read the reports of the Official Languages Commissioner, Mr. Graham Fraser. We thank him and welcome his report.

He obviously raises some concerns that must be dealt with. I do not think I have to convince honourable senators of that. It is well known that our government is committed to linguistic duality. We

are acting in the interests of minority language communities to ensure the vitality of French and English in Canada.

For example, on May 24 we reopened Saint-Jean Royal Military College, which had been closed by the previous government; on June 6 we announced over \$750,000 to benefit Ontario's francophone community; and on May 30 we made an investment of \$1.7 million to support French language education in New Brunswick.

In the Speech from the Throne we committed to proposing a strategy to implement the next phase of the Action Plan for Official Languages. In Budget 2008 we reaffirmed this commitment and we will be announcing the next phase of our action plan as soon as possible. We now have the benefit of the report of the former Premier of New Brunswick, Bernard Lord.

As I have said before, the government takes this issue very seriously. We will ensure that funds intended for official language minorities will be continued until the new action plan is in place, as I reported in this place earlier.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: The last action plan expired on March 31, 2008. Tulip season is over, spring is ending and summer, which begins on June 20, is just around the corner. When will the government present the new Action Plan on Official Languages?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: We have received the Bernard Lord report. I am well aware that the previous plan expired at the end of March. We have been working very hard on this action plan.

I wish to assure honourable senators on both sides of this chamber that this announcement will be made as soon as possible. The honourable senator will be delighted that she waited for the results, because the results will be very positive.