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Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, April 23, 2015

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

BUDGET 2015—LINGUISTIC DUALITY

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Mr. Leader, something is conspicuously absent from the federal budget tabled on Tuesday, April 21, the French version of which is 588 pages long and the English version of which is 518 pages long. Unfortunately, there is no mention of linguistic duality or official languages in the budget. It contains no funding or new measures for minority francophone communities or English Quebecers.

Mr. Leader, the government has a constitutional obligation toward official language communities. Members of the francophonie in minority communities have strongly expressed their disappointment at this omission from the budget. Even young people are concerned.

Here is what the president of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française said:

Like our comrades in the Canadian francophonie, we think it is a great shame that the francophonie, linguistic duality and official languages are not mentioned in the budget.

Mr. Leader, why didn't the government choose to enhance the services, structures, organizations and institutions that enable our people to carry on their lives in their official language in their own community?

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government): Thank you, senator. As you know, we have increased spending in support of the francophone community to over \$600 million per year. That amount is three times higher than it was in 2006. Our government adopted the roadmap and has invested more than any other in bilingualism and the francophone community.

• (1350)

We have also worked extensively with francophones around the world to support francophone immigration to Canada, and we will continue to stand up for linguistic duality and ensure that our francophone minority communities flourish.

Senator Tardif: Leader, there is absolutely no mention of funding for literacy in the budget. However, you know that the demand for literacy programs is on the rise and that such programs are becoming less and less accessible for francophone minority communities. You also know that this situation is having a negative impact on their economic and social well-being.

Members of the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences recently reported that francophone minority communities desperately need funding.

In fact, the organization could close its doors because of a lack of funding. In 2013, the government stopped funding provincial and territorial associations.

Leader, why is funding for literacy, a key factor in the development of francophone minority communities, not in this budget?

Senator Carignan: Senator, as I mentioned earlier, we recognize that official language communities contribute to the cultural, social and economic vitality of our society. That is why the \$1.1 billion allocated under our government's Roadmap for Official Languages is the most comprehensive investment in official languages in Canada's history.

There is no question about that. The Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018 involves 14 federal institutions, which are implementing 28 initiatives in different sectors. Senator, our commitment to the official languages is unwavering.

As you know, Minister Glover will continue to ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act. You have a clear commitment on the part of the government through our roadmap, which has been very well received throughout the francophone community. This is 2015, and the roadmap covers the period from 2013 to 2018.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Perhaps you need to review your roadmap regarding the amounts transferred to the provinces and territories every year for minority language education.

The amount provided in 2007-08 was \$258.597 million for the new roadmap. From 2009 to 2012, the amount granted was the same, \$258.597 million, in other words, a zero increase. During the next phase, the roadmap for 2013 to 2018, the amount is \$259,558,277, which is an increase of less than 0.4 per cent. Indeed, the amounts are not as impressive as you claim, and the numbers you are giving us are misleading at best.

In any case, I would like to come back to the issue of francophone immigration, which is a major challenge for our francophone minority communities. So far, the Express Entry program still does not include a francophone component. Furthermore, given that the Francophone Significant Benefit Program was cancelled last fall, the situation has become problematic for many immigrants.

Francophone communities were expecting a firm commitment in the budget to help promote francophone immigration. I would like to quote the executive director of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, who had this to say:

We were hoping for a coherent plan for immigration, with something specifically for the francophone community, but there is nothing like that in this budget . . .

The Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick criticized the lack of funding. It said, and I quote:

The government says that immigration is important, but the budget does not reflect that view. That is worrisome. We count on our governments to ensure that francophone immigration is not just something people talk about, but something that really gets support.

Can the Leader of the Government explain why the government avoided any mention of funding for francophone immigration?

Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government): We committed to promoting francophone immigration across Canada through our permanent immigration programs. What is more, most applications filed under the Express Entry system, which you mentioned, are processed in six months or less.

Last year alone, Canada welcomed 1,436 francophone immigrants outside Quebec through its permanent economic immigration programs. Our government set a goal of increasing the number of francophone immigrants who settle outside Quebec to over 4 per cent of all economic immigrants by 2018.

Senator, you are familiar with the Francophonie. There is no need to remind you that after France, Canada has the largest French-speaking population of the Western countries. Canada has the fifth-largest French-speaking population in the world. To attract francophone immigrants, we committed to promoting francophone immigration, and we are going to continue to do just that.

Furthermore, our participation in international Francophonie organizations is a great opportunity to attract even more francophone immigrants to Canada.

Senator Tardif: I support and applaud the fact that the government set a target of 4.4 per cent for francophone immigration. However, resources are needed. It is not enough to say that we support that goal. We need to know what resources there will be to help us meet it.

Senator Carignan: In Canada, more than \$600 million is spent every year on francophone immigration settlement services, and that spending has tripled since 2006. What is more, since 2008, we have helped create 163 new points of service for francophone immigrants in an effort to improve communities' ability to receive immigrants and facilitate their integration.

Moreover, as part of the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, Citizenship and Immigration Canada has invested \$29.4 million to support official language minority communities.

We are also investing \$120 million in helping economic immigrants acquire the official language skills they need to live and work in their new community. I don't think it is fair to say that the resources are lacking, senator, since the government's actions prove that it is putting its money where its mouth is.

[Later]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Mr. Leader, in response to Senator Chaput, you said that your government had invested \$600 million to create 163 centres across the country to promote the integration of immigrants. However, if we want to have integration, we need to have immigrants.

The Express Entry system is being used now. Since January, more than 22,000 applications have been placed in the Express Entry pool. When Minister Alexander appeared in the other place, he indicated that among these candidates there were just 200 francophones — 200 out of more than 22,000 applications. Employers don't know that, and immigrants who are applying don't necessarily know either.

Unless we incorporate a francophone lens into the Express Entry system, we'll never meet the targets you have set.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

• (1410)

Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government): I didn't hear the question, but I imagine there was one in the senator's comments.

Senator Tardif: Why?

Senator Carignan: I will continue to answer the senator by saying that our target is over 4 per cent of all economic immigrants by 2018. Our government's concrete actions, particularly the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, as Senator Mockler points out, show that everything is being done to meet that target.

Senator Tardif: I will repeat the question, since I didn't state it clearly. I thought the question was obvious. I know that you are a man who understands subtlety, Senator Carignan.

The question is: Why not include a francophone lens if we really want to attract francophone immigration? With only 200 francophones among the more than 20,000 applicants so far, we are not going to get the number of immigrants we need. Why not include such a lens, which would clearly address this need?

Senator Carignan: Senator, as I said, last year alone we welcomed 1,436 francophone immigrants outside Quebec through our permanent economic immigration program. Specific measures are being taken. You talked about the \$600 million spent annually, an amount that has tripled since 2006. Since 2008, we have created 163 new points of service for francophone immigrants in order to improve communities' ability to welcome them.

The tools and the means are in place to attract francophone immigrants and integrate them into our communities.