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TREASURY BOARD

Elimination of Court Challenges Program

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, October 26, 2006

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

TREASURY BOARD

ELIMINATION OF COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne announced today that it filed a petition yesterday with the Federal Court of Canada to declare null and void the government's decision to eliminate funding for the Court Challenges Program, because it believes that:

... the federal government's decision to stop funding the Court Challenges Program did not sufficiently take into account the impact on the development and vitality of official language minority communities, nor the government's commitments to linguistic minorities under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Official Languages Act*.

The claim filed by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada was supported by the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, the Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law, the Commission nationale des parents francophones and the Quebec Community Groups Network.

• (1425)

Honourable senators will recall that, on October 19, in response to a question, the minister stated that the government consulted many people during its expenditure review process.

Could the minister tell us if consultations were indeed carried out, who was consulted within the official language minority communities, and whether her government gave any thought to the impact that abolishing the Court Challenges Program might have on these communities?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the honourable senator for her question. She has been reading from a release of an organization, and I would be very happy to receive a copy of that from her. The other day when she asked her question, I undertook to obtain information for her.

Off the top of my head, I cannot list all of the different groups with whom the government consulted because the cabinet committee that met over the summer took their advice primarily from the various departments when they were asked to go to the departments and find savings. Therefore, I do not have a list of people who were consulted, but if such a list can be made available I would be more than happy to share it with the honourable senator.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, with respect, those most directly concerned have not been consulted; otherwise, there would have been no petition filed with the Federal Court. I can also say that not only are official language minority communities weakened by that decision, but the strength of our nation's democracy is also affected.

[English]

Senator LeBreton: As I said the other day — and I am not sure if there is a question there — I will attempt to obtain as much information as possible for the honourable senator on the subject.