



BULLETIN

Canadian Conference of the Arts ~ Conférence canadienne des arts

New economic update unclear on additional money for culture

Ottawa, November 16, 2005 – Recently there has been a remarkable amount of political theatre in Ottawa. The plot is compelling, the cast uneven, and the outcome uncertain enough to keep Parliament watchers on the edge of their collective seats.

It would seem likely that Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Paul Martin's minority government is in its last days. The leaders of the three opposition parties have come together in a strategy that will give Canadians a chance to vote in the coming months and to enjoy a healthy serving of electioneering with their holiday turkeys.

What is clear is that if the plug is pulled on the current Parliament, several things will happen:

- all legislation on the Order Paper will die,
- the next federal budget will not likely take place until April or May 2006, at the earliest,
- some of the programs in the pipeline will not be given Parliamentary authority to spend,
- Supplementary Estimates, which are a vehicle to move funds around within the federal government, will not pass. This will create some real financial pressures on several agencies of the Department Canadian Heritage Portfolio who have been awaiting transfers to fund programs and initiatives,
- The details of the Economic Update by the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Ralph Goodale, will be in real jeopardy of lengthy delays or cancellation if the government does not win re-election.

What does the Canadian cultural sector stand to lose if the federal government falls? In reviewing the Economic Statement issued this past Monday by the Minister of Finance the answer would seem to be "unclear" when it comes to additional federal spending on the arts and cultural industries. Despite the impressive packaging of the Economic Update, which promises to redirect some \$39 billion dollars to high priorities of the government, one would be hard pressed to find dime one of new monies destined for the cultural sector. In fact, the only explicit mentions of cultural spending in the lengthy statement and the accompanying "A Plan for Growth and Prosperity" document refer to funding for the "Tomorrow Starts Today" program, which was already allocated monies in the February 2005 budget.

The work of the Canadian Arts Coalition and other in the sector that have been urging the government to increase its investment in the arts appears to not have resonated with the government in these hectic political times. However, a glimmer of optimism appears in Chapter 5 of The Economic and Fiscal Update, in a section entitled "Building Canada's Communities", which reads as follows:

"To build safe, creative and sustainable communities that are magnets for investment and support a quality of life second to none, the Government will build on recent major investments such as those made under the Government's infrastructure programs, the New Deal for Cities and Communities, the National Security Policy and Tomorrow Starts Today with new measures in Budget 2006."

If the government truly wanted to signal it had heard the message of advocates for the arts and culture, they certainly did not use Monday's Economic Update to acknowledge this. Widely regarded in the media as a preview of things to come in the impending Liberal party election platform, the Economic Statement's lack of attention to arts and cultural priorities proves a discouraging sign of the campaign to come, wherein the sector's key issues are relegated to off-the-political radar status. One is left with only vague promises to "build on recent major investments" in the form of "new measures", which are open to interpretation in politically turbulent times like these.

However, such an oversight has never been a deterrent for the Canadian Conference of the Arts and its members. In fact, it provides us a clear opportunity to press the point home with all political parties that will be canvassing for the support of Canadians come election day, whenever that may be. It is a motivation to redouble our collective efforts to persuade all political parties to pronounce their intentions for the cultural sector should they win the next election.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts will keep you apprised of further developments as this drama continues to unfold. Our work is cut out for us, but we are confident that Canadian artists and arts professionals are equal to the task.

Sixty years strong, the Canadian Conference of the Arts is the national forum for the arts and cultural community in Canada. It serves as a leader, authority, and catalyst to ensure that artists can contribute freely and fully to a creative, dynamic, and civil Canadian society.

For more information on the CCA's current advocacy work, please visit our website at www.ccarts.ca

For more information:
Laura Coletta
Director of
Communications
804 - 130 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4
(613) 238 3561 ext.21
Fax (613) 238 4849
info@ccarts.ca
www.ccarts.ca

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