



BULLETIN

Canadian Conference of the Arts ~ Conférence canadienne des arts

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT RELEASED

Ottawa, January 7, 2005 - The report of the Standing Committee on Finance (*Moving Forward: Balancing Priorities and Making Choices for the Economy of the Twenty-First Century*) was released just prior to the Christmas break. It can be found at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/committee/CommitteePublication.aspx?SourceId=96733>

The report contains a separate chapter for Culture, with three sections: what the federal government provides; what the witnesses said; and what the Committee believes. The recommendation at the end of this chapter states:

Recommendation 11

The federal government provide stable, long-term funding to the following elements of federal support for arts and culture: the Tomorrow Starts Today program; the Canada Council for the Arts; Telefilm Canada; the Museums Assistance Program; the Community Access Program; the Canadian Television Fund and initiatives designed to promote Canadian culture internationally.

Moreover, the government should increase funding for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio-Canada.

As well, the government should allocate funds to build capacity and assist archives with respect to archival content.

Finally, the government should increase the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit to 30%.

The following is taken from the section "What the Committee believes":

"... culture is central to our quality of life. It helps to define who we are as individuals and who we are as a nation.... The Committee believe[s] that long-term and stable funding in a number of areas is required in order that activities can be planned appropriately. We are proud of what our artists - regardless of their medium - have accomplished domestically and internationally, and feel that continued federal support of arts and culture is both desirable and in the best interests of Canadians.... We also believe that heritage buildings and museums must be supported and preserved for our benefit, the benefit of future generations, and the benefit of those who visit our country."

Other comments and recommendations of note include:

- ⇒ "Support was expressed for the role taken by the federal government as the International Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Content and Artistic Expression is being developed at UNESCO. In particular, culture would be exempted from international trade agreements."
- ⇒ Recommendation 25 urged the government to amend the Employment Insurance Act "to establish a transparent employment insurance rate-setting process".

In the dissenting opinions, Bloc Québécois made the following statement:

"The various arts groups called for the cancellation of cuts and reinvestment in the budgets of various organizations such as the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada, the Canada Telefilm Fund, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The Committee report reflects these issues, but omits an important recommendation from the publishing world to eliminate the GST on books."

CCA was particularly gratified this year that cultural organizations were grouped together for the presentations - an almost unprecedented occurrence - as this undoubtedly made the messages stronger. One common theme from all groups was the necessity to renew the Tomorrow Starts Today (TST) initiative, with a permanent funding commitment. This is an

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issue which has united the sector as no other in recent times, and the message was heard loud and clear by the Committee, as evidenced in the above recommendation. [The IST funding was renewed for a one year period just before the holidays, with a further two years' of funding rumoured to be announced in the Budget next month (see Bulletin 62/04, dated 15 December).]

Many groups also advocated for increased support for the Canada Council and CBC. On the heritage front, the government's outdated museum policy was cited, plus the need for increased federal support for museums.

The Committee is to be commended for producing such a comprehensive report, especially as the parliamentary schedule imposed a short time frame. The consultations undertaken by the Standing Committee on Finance, and its subsequent report, are an important element of the federal budgetary process but, as the report itself states, it is "*just one tool that may be used to communicate the priorities of Canadians to the Minister of Finance*".

CCA encourages its members to stay in contact with their own Members of Parliament during the House's January adjournment, as a caucus meeting will be scheduled for the end of the month - likely the last opportunity for MPs to bring their constituents' views to the table on the upcoming Budget.