
Canadian Actors' Equity Association's submission to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage



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Executive Summary

Canadian Actors' Equity Association (Equity) is the professional association of performers, directors, choreographers, fight directors and stage managers in English Canada who are engaged in live performance in theatre, opera and dance. Our membership now stands at over 5,500.

Recognizing that the arts are vital to life and artists make an invaluable contribution to our society, Equity supports the creative efforts of its members by seeking to improve their working conditions and opportunities.

The business of Equity is to negotiate and administer collective agreements, provide benefit plans, information and support, and act as an advocate for its membership

The Impact of the Cuts to Programs

Equity is pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the Committee and we are heartened to see how swiftly the Committee has responded to the outcry from the cultural community. However, we are saddened that this is the subject of these hearings and we trust that today's meeting is the first step in designing a comprehensive cultural policy with input from all major stakeholders. Several concerns need to be addressed when reviewing the Government's recent decision to terminate these 15 programs at the end of the fiscal year. There is a substantial economic argument to be made to retain these funds. All of Canadian society suffers when our culture is damaged, and lastly, the manner in which these cuts have been implemented and announced demand scrutiny.

Equity has worked with our colleagues in the live performance field for many years to lobby the Government to ensure that policies are in place which create an environment conducive to a stable and sustainable sector. In doing so, we have consistently spoken in favour of programs which deliver project and capacity building funding. Both of these types of funding have been recently targeted.

Frankly, we are mystified by the reason for the Government's decision, as its spokespersons have sent out mixed messages. On the one hand, we have heard that the cuts are financial decisions, decisions on programs which, according to Minister Flaherty "*...reached their objectives, had high administration costs, had poor performance or did not give satisfactory results.*" and yet the cultural industries have received no evidence of how and why this is true. Only days before the cuts were announced, The Conference Board of Canada made public their report "Valuing Culture - Measuring and Understanding Canada's Creative Economy." That report only confirmed what we in the cultural sector have known for a long time - that we are an integral part of the new economy, representing an economic footprint as high as 7.4% of Canada's real GDP with as many as 1.1 million people employed. Statistics Canada's employment by industry figures published earlier this year identified that the "information, culture and recreation" sector outpaced the goods-producing sector (agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, oil and gas,

construction and manufacturing combined) by 7.7% in the period 2003-2007. The importance of this growth is further reinforced by the fact that, according to additional Statistics Canada data, 41% of the Canadian population 15 years or older (or approximately 10.76 million Canadians) attended a concert or performance by professional artists of music, dance, theatre or opera in 2005. This only serves to illustrate the important place that arts and culture plays in the daily lives of our citizens.

In addition to the figures presented by The Conference Board and Statistics Canada, renowned economic thinker Richard Florida has provided substantial statistical support for the "Creative Classes" role in transforming the modern economy from a declining industrial model to a vibrant and growing idea-driven one.

As to the effect on the membership, these cuts will have an impact that we have yet to tally. As you know, one piece of funding levers another one into place and the delicate financial construction of so many artistic projects can tumble to the ground when one brick is removed. But let me give you one specific example - we represent the dancers at The Royal Winnipeg Ballet. In 2006, the RWB was the recipient of a \$40,000 DFAIT grant which allowed them to tour into the United States. That tour provided three additional weeks of work for the 29 Equity members in the company. International touring provides exposure to both audiences and critics, enhances Canada's artistic reputation and, speaking as a union leader, offers much needed additional work weeks for the members. No one disputes the importance of international competition in preparing our athletes to deliver at the highest level. Canadian artists need to see and be seen beyond our borders too. It is hard for us to understand why these cuts have been made since the economic argument in support of the arts and culture sector seems to be irrefutable.

The Prime Minister's own Press Secretary was quoted in The Globe and Mail as saying that *"...the [funding] choices made were inappropriate ... inappropriate because they were ideological in some cases, with highly ideological individuals exposing their agendas or [money going to] wealthy celebrities or fringe arts groups that in many cases would be at best, unrepresentative, and at worst, offensive."* Let me go on record at this point and say that I do not believe it is appropriate for funding decisions to be made using unspecified and subjective criteria to determine appropriate ideology. Canada has a history of implementing programs that provide assistance to export goods and services, including the provision of business loans, bridge financing, and help in preparing a product for the international market. While browsing through the recipient list, I noticed that a furniture manufacturer's association was on the list. I am quite confident that were you to examine the product of each manufacturer whose product went overseas with the help of a government program, you would inevitably find some items were shoddily made from inferior materials, not to mention that other ones were just plain ugly. However, no one would advocate cutting off that sector from further support just because they sold a sofa that didn't conform to the Minister's idea of appropriate decor, now would they? If an artistic work does not contravene an obscenity, hate or sedition law in this country, then what any one of us in this room think about it personally isn't even remotely relevant, except at the box office and whether or not we choose to spend our after-tax dollars to see the work.

Lastly, I want to comment on the way in which the cuts were announced. For the better part of a week, every morning my colleagues and I would browse the Canadian Heritage website, literally cringing, wondering where the axe had fallen anew. Which program would it be today? Whose project would be abandoned because of another program's elimination? We were given no warning, no reason and no consultation. The members are angry, concerned and worried. Is it over? Is there another shoe to drop? And will it be a heavy construction boot rather than a delicate ballet slipper? Cuts to one sector of the arts hurt us all, so I am equally concerned about the ability of this country to preserve its audio-visual heritage, to create and distribute educational and information films to Canadians, for Canadian magazines to compete in a marketplace dominated by American material and for the producers who engage the members to continue to create, grow and sustain their infrastructure.

When I sit in the audience watching the members on stage, whether they are acting, singing or dancing, I am struck by the extraordinary talent this country has to offer to Canadians and to the world. And I am very, very proud to represent these artists. But we need our Government to have a meaningful cultural policy which provides stable and sustainable support. Or all this will disappear.

Therefore, Canadian Actors' Equity Association calls on the Government to review its decision to terminate these programs and to explain to the arts community how cultural diplomacy activities will be funded in the future. Further, we ask the Government to commit to increased, stable multi-year funding for all federal arts and culture sector programs, regardless of the department through which it flows.