



MINISTERS DEFEND SPENDING ON CULTURE

**AILEEN CARROLL
AND CHRISTINE ST-PIERRE**

As ministers of culture for Quebec and Ontario, we want to convey our deep disappointment about the recent cuts to federal arts and culture programs. In so doing, we are joining countless Canadian artists and arts organizations who have publicly expressed their grave concern.

We understand that at least seven programs that provide crucial support to Canada's cultural sector have already been cut. We have now learned that the federal government intends to continue this ill-advised course of action, abolishing or severely reducing the budgets of essential initiatives.

Our artists make unique, important and necessary contributions to the cultural, social, economic and political development of our vibrant society. They act as ambassadors for our culture abroad and here at home. The excellence and the originality of their work witness and mirror to the world the modernity, dynamism and vitality of our country. They are the creative engines of our knowledge-based economy.

The culture sector plays a vital role in the Canadian economy. In Quebec and Ontario, the sector contributes close to \$30 billion to both provinces' GDP, which represents 68 per cent of the national cultural sector. The sector also employs roughly 616,000 people across the country of whom 68 per cent call Quebec and Ontario home.

Culture is one of Canada's fastest growing economic sectors. It's spin-off benefits include growth and diversification in tourism and local economies, and skills development for the knowledge economy. Investing in our home-grown talent on the international stage encourages foreign investment, opens new markets for export and promotes our country as a cultural tourism destination.

Equally vital, culture helps us define who we are, describes where we have been and signals where we are going. Culture is an essential ingredient to the cohesiveness of our society and to the promotion of our identity.

This is not the time for the federal government to reduce support for culture. Governments need to invest in the people and businesses that make up our cultural industries so that Canada's economy will reap the benefits. The governments of Quebec and Ontario understand this and have targeted the cultural sector for investment to generate future growth in our economy. Given the context of globalization, now is the time for each province to promote Canadian culture. Our governments recognize the power of culture in the conduct of international affairs, which is essential for a country like Canada.

By cutting these federal programs, without any notice or consultation, the federal government has put the future of organizations and initiatives across the country at serious risk. These programs, primarily for international development, film, video and new media, have complemented Quebec and Ontario programs in priority areas. They promote our artists touring abroad and support the work of such prestigious institutions as the Society for Arts and Technology and the Institut national de l'image et du son, Hot Docs and the Canadian Film Centre. These cuts will compromise years of work on the part of organizations, artists and governments to make culture a sector of excellence recognized throughout the world.

To grow a stronger economy and put Canada on the international stage, we will need to work together. Quebec and Ontario will be raising this issue at the Sept. 25-26 meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for culture and heritage in Quebec City. We hope that our colleagues from across Canada will join us in urging the federal government to reinstate these programs and reinvigorate federal funding in arts and culture. We both have asked federal Heritage Minister Josée Verner to meet with us and to work together to ensure that Canadian arts and culture remains a powerful contributor to the development of our creative society, our economic diversity and future prosperity.

It is one thing to review programs to make sure funding is there for those who need it; it is quite another to scrap an entire program because of an ideological aversion to a handful of ideas.

Aileen Carroll is Ontario's minister of culture and minister responsible for seniors. Christine St-Pierre is Quebec's minister of culture, communications and women's issues.