

IS BEV ODA COMMITTED TO ARTS FUNDING?

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By JAMES ADAMS

Canadian arts organizations were in a bit of a tizzy Thursday after an article appeared in **Le Devoir** that said, despite sometimes soothing words from Conservative culture critic **Bev Oda**, that the party's arts platform appears insubstantial and fraught with uncertainty. "The only sure thing is that nothing is sure," said **Le Devoir's Stéphane Baillargeon**.

True, a Tory government has promised it will "maintain the roles" of Canada's major cultural institutions -- but the doubling of the **Canada Council's** budget announced last fall by the Liberals "doesn't seem to be assured, contrary to the rumour circulating in the media for the last several days."

Citing an interview with Oda for **Le Devoir**, Baillargeon quotes her as saying the Conservatives will "honour the budget increase if this is what the Canada Council needs and if the money was already budgeted" by the Liberals.

However, that increase, said Oda, doesn't seem to be in any federal budget document. "We've looked in vain. When we're elected, we'll look at the relevant documents, and judge the plans for ourselves." Adding that her party might even decide to give more money than the Liberals to the arts council, she said that "first we have to assure ourselves that this organization is effective and that it serves artists and creators well."

Oda's remarks prompted one of Quebec's largest arts groups, the **Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres**, to "demand" that the Tories commit themselves to doubling the Canada Council's budget "if it comes to power. It's part and parcel of the health of the Québécois and Canadian identity."