



The Right Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier
Government of British Columbia
P.O. Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt.
Victoria BC
V8W 9E1

By mail and email

August 20th, 2010

Dear Premier Campbell,

Re: Cuts to the BC arts sector

I am writing again to you today on behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) to express our deep concerns about the devastating cuts of provincial support to the arts and culture communities of British Columbia, as well as about the resignation of the widely respected BC Arts Council Chair, Ms. Jane Danzo.

As the largest and oldest Canada-wide organization in the arts, culture and heritage sector, the CCA does not often intervene in issues of provincial concern. Founded 65 years ago, the CCA's mission is to be the national forum for the sector and to document and promote the development and implementation of cultural policies at the federal level. Our goal is to encourage and foster the health and growth of this important sector within Canada and to enhance the cultural life of Canadians.

However, we cannot remain silent when we hear how your government abandons its support to arts and culture organizations in British Columbia, many of which are members of ours. Past investments by BC governments, while for decades amongst the lowest per capita in Canada, have yielded remarkable results. Your province ranks

amongst the first in Canada for the number and the quality of its artists and creators, notably in the visual arts, who have gained your province and the country an international reputation.

Last year's success of the *BC Scene* event at the National Arts Centre was a clear illustration of the incredible talent and creative power of your province's artistic community. And if further proof were required, all three levels of government recognized the importance of arts and culture by investing considerable sums of money to showcase Canadian and British Columbian talent at the Cultural Olympiad during the very successful Winter Olympics, thus confirming the contribution the arts make to Canada's image abroad.

It bears repeating once again that the arts and culture sector is at the vanguard of the shift to a post-industrial economy which must be strategically guided by Canada's various levels of government. According to documents produced by your own Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, BC's arts and culture sector employs close to 80 000 people and contributes over \$5 billion to the provincial economy. BC has the largest percentage of its labour force in arts occupations and, as such, ranks first amongst the ten provinces. The arts are a growth sector in most Canadian cities and Vancouver boasts the third largest concentration of professional artists in Canada.

Moreover, British Columbia's population represents much of the cultural diversity that increasingly characterizes Canadian society. As such, investing in the arts and culture sector should be a strong component of your government's strategy to tap this inexhaustible natural resource to advance creativity, boost the economy, lead to greater social cohesion and contribute to our identity as a nation.

In this context, we are appalled to hear the extremely severe financial cuts that BC arts organizations are being hit with further to your government's decisions, both through cuts to the budget of the BCAC and through the elimination of support from gaming grants. This is made particularly dramatic given the fact that like the rest of the arts and culture sector across the country, those organizations still have to feel the full impact of the recent recession. We are equally concerned that major policy shifts, made without consultation with the BC Arts Council, have set irresponsible and indefensible precedents.

On that front, we want to reassert the importance of the arm's length relationship which must exist between governments, politicians and cultural granting agencies. Arts and politics do not mix well: this is why so many countries, including Canada and most provinces, have established independent Arts Councils and rely on peer jury systems as the best possible way of granting money to artists and cultural organizations. This is a characteristic of healthy democracies and remains the best way to encourage innovation and creativity in a nation. Like our colleagues in BC, we applaud Ms. Danzo's courageous decision to resign in protest of both the drastic cuts imposed by your government and the fact that BCAC does not possess the independence normally given to such granting agencies.

For all those reasons, we find it ill-advised that provincial investments in the arts and culture sector be drastically and unfairly cut to help balance the books. With all due respect, we submit that this is a strategic error that will have negative impacts not only on tourism and economic development but also severely compromise the role your province plays in defining Canadian identity at home and abroad.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts therefore urges you and your government to think of the long-term interests of British Columbians and to reverse the current policy regarding the arts, which can only be described as short-view and contrary to the interests not only of British Columbians but of all Canadians. We also submit that the BC Arts Council should be restructured on the model of other Arts Councils in Canada and in other countries and enjoy the independence which is necessary to a thriving arts community.

Yours truly,



Kathleen Sharpe
President

CC The Hon. Kevin Krueger, Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts
The Hon. Colin Hansen, Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier

The Province
The Vancouver Sun
The Georgian Straight
The Victoria News
The Times Colonist