

Government Orders

Department of Canadian Heritage and the myriad components of government cannot escape this one inevitability, change. Three factors contribute to this atmosphere of change.

First, fiscal restraint is forcing us to rethink the way that governments do business. The reduction of the deficit is in the interest of all Canadians and constitutes a priority of our government.

Second, the global village of which Marshall McLuhan wrote so prophetically in 1962 has become a reality. In particular, the globalization of world markets creates a new context for business and trade, a context which is increasingly important to Canada which is becoming more and more dependent on exports. This context demands that the machinery of government be up to date, finely honed and highly effective, capable of responding to an international economic environment in which transactions take place instantaneously.

Finally, the relentless evolution of new technologies impels us to revisit the means by which we distribute products and services among the population. Canada, which has repeatedly overcome challenges of geography and climate, particularly today, is no stranger to revolutions in communications.

The red book has articulated our commitment to simplify public sector structures and streamline operations wherever possible to respond to today's changing environment. We also want to encourage creativity and innovation in meeting challenges, not as problems but as opportunities.

Toward these ends, my colleague the minister has undertaken this exercise which promises to bring efficiency gains. It is an exercise that will maximize the opportunity for the good governance of the work that agencies, boards and advisory boards do.

Our goal is clear: to modernize the machinery of state with a view to rendering government more efficient and more responsive to the needs of the citizens which it serves.

The Department of Canadian Heritage along with the agencies and crown corporations of the Canadian heritage portfolio participated in this renewal exercise. As a result it was a very collaborative, open process. There was a collegial tone to the consultations with full agreement achieved so that the boards could continue their work efficiently, effectively and with smaller numbers.

A November 26 article in the *Montreal Gazette* asked the following question: When governments are strapped for cash can they afford to support culture? I can assure this House that culture is one of our strongest allies in building a stronger and more unified nation.

As the red book states, culture is the very essence of national identity, the bedrock of national sovereignty and national pride. At a time when globalization and the information and communications revolutions are erasing national borders, Canada needs more than ever to commit itself to cultural development.

The government's intention has not been to weaken Canada's national cultural institutions but to streamline them and to make them more effective and efficient. I support the July initiative to eliminate and streamline agencies in an equitable fashion and support the continued development of culture in Canada.

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The government's initiative to eliminate and streamline agencies underscores the reality that better more effective government does not necessarily mean more government, or that this concept is incompatible with the need to work with less. We can work with less without affecting quality. Canadians have proved that throughout our history.

Our intention is clear: to modernize the machinery of government. That means reducing the parts to streamline our activities where applicable and thereby optimize the success of board appointments. This provides some assurance to Canadians by placing the onus on governments to make good appointments, appointments that are necessary and that are made on the basis of competence.

As a result in the area of Canadian heritage I support such measures as reducing the size of the Canada Council, as well as the boards of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the federal museums and the National Film Board to name a few. Together these reductions will account for 85 government in council positions and 10 ministerial appointments.

This process of streamlining will not adversely affect the development, support of, or dissemination of Canadian cultural expression. Culture is not simply an expression of the artistically inclined or spiritual abstract. Culture infuses every dimension of society. There is an inextricable connection between the cultural sector and its contribution to the economy.

I am among those who cannot imagine a society, a viable and vibrant society, without culture. Our challenge goes beyond that of mere economic stability. Our challenge is to protect the sector whose role and vocation is to give a sense of what it is to be Canadian, to be a witness to our collective consciousness. In fact, I am among those who believe that as a society it will be our culture that will affirm our position and strength in the community of nations in today's global village.

It is incumbent upon us therefore to go forward to maintain the gains that we have made as a nation. We must adapt to the new realities that confront and challenge us and move forward on a solid foundation of effective and responsive government.