



For immediate release

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### **Don't hurt our culture, Mr. Harper**

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Today we are writing to send a heartfelt message to Stephen Harper's government. Of all the issues that are important to the Liberal Party of Canada, Canadian culture stands out. Since 2006, many of the Conservative government's actions have demonstrated that their vision of culture is quite different from ours. Let's take as an example the Conservatives' decision to cut the PromArt and Trade Routes programs in 2008, despite objections from representatives across Canada's Canadian cultural sector, who warned that this unjustified decision would have extremely negative consequences on the arts.

For some time now, we have had concerns with a new issue related to culture: foreign ownership rules in broadcasting. Liberals are worried that these rules might soon change. While the foreign ownership rules in the telecommunications industry contained in the *Telecommunications Act* should be examined, we firmly believe that the foreign ownership rules for broadcasting companies, as stated in the *Broadcasting Act*, must be preserved. Canadian television and radio stations must remain Canadian.

As for integrated companies working in both telecommunications and broadcasting (such as Vidéotron, Shaw, or Rogers), we must ensure that they continue to remain Canadian property. Otherwise, if a foreign company takes over a television or radio station here, there's a good chance it will prioritize broadcasting non-Canadian material.

Thanks to Canadian productions, our culture is currently in the spotlight abroad. Many television series are shown around the world, allowing foreign audiences to get to know Canadian culture. This is the kind of attention the Canadian government should be supporting. If we start broadcasting foreign series, the entire cultural industry of Canada will lose its creative leverage.

Why are we so concerned? The Harper government made a decision on the sly which grants a company with foreign interests, Globalive, access to the Canadian wireless communications market, despite objections from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC). This decision was announced without even consulting the Parliament. Although we agree that certain parts of the Telecommunications Act need to be reviewed, we firmly believe that MPs should discuss this

matter in the House of Commons. This decision should not have been made by a limited group of people in the Prime Minister's Office. This issue is just too important to Canadians.

When faced with pressure from foreign media groups, how do we know that the Harper government will not once again make decisions behind closed doors that will change the broadcasting ownership rules? In this era of convergence, how does the Globalive decision affect these rules? What is the Harper government's position on this sensitive issue? Unfortunately, given this government's lack of transparency, we have no answers to these questions until after it's too late.

The position of the Liberal party is clear: Canadian culture is much too important to our collective identity for us to allow foreign companies to control our television and radio stations. We must also take into consideration all the people whose jobs depend on the production of Canadian content for our broadcasters. If a foreign company was to acquire a Canadian broadcaster, how would this affect the Canadian content regulations? How many people would lose their jobs? How many Canadian programs would be cut? Would this mark the end of Canadian programming over the long term?

If the Harper Conservative government wants to have an open and straight discussion on the subject of foreign broadcast ownership, we are ready to listen. However, they must keep in mind that for the Liberal Party of Canada, defending all forms of Canadian culture is a priority, and that for us, it's a matter of principle.

Canadians deserve the government's reassurance on the issue of protecting Canadian culture. We sincerely hope that the Harper Conservative government will heed our call and take time to listen to all those involved and consider the impacts on this country's culture before making a decision on an issue that could forever harm the cultural landscape of Canada.

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