

The Honourable Bev J. Oda  
Minister of Canadian Heritage  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON  
K1A 0A6

October 2, 2006

Dear Minister Oda:

I am writing today on behalf of conservators and others committed to heritage preservation in Canada to signal our dismay at the drastic cuts to your department's Museum Assistance Programme (MAP) announced Monday, September 25 by Treasury Board Secretary John Baird. We strongly protest cuts of \$4.6 million over two years out of a budget of \$11.8 million to the only federal funding program that supports museum programs.

Canada's network of regional and community museums preserve the irreplaceable material heritage of Canadian history, art, and culture. Through funding assistance from MAP, these institutions have been able to better care for collections and make them accessible to Canadians across the country. Of particular concern to us as conservators, Organization Development funding enabled museums to upgrade storage and museum environments and thus better ensure that Canadian material culture will be preserved for generations to come. This program also provided professional development funds to support training workshops that help maintain high standards of expertise related to care of collections within these institutions. We, as professional conservators, are all too familiar with the sad deterioration and disappearance of our material heritage through neglect that comes not from lack of awareness but from lack of funding to hire the staff and purchase materials that will make a difference.

We are particularly disappointed that this announcement of cuts to MAP comes at a time when positive discussions between the museum community and Canadian Heritage are leading towards a new policy for museums in Canada. Perhaps a review of MAP is needed. Perhaps funding could be used more effectively. Perhaps other programs are already being considered that will provide alternative sources of funding, as has been suggested in relation to other cuts. As it stands, however, the government has sent a clear message to the Canadian public that museums are not important and that the MAP funds are inefficiently used and will therefore not be missed. In the heritage community that has scraped by with funding assistance that remains at 1972 levels, further reductions will very much be missed.

We encourage Canadian Heritage to play a different role with respect to heritage preservation, one foreshadowed by recent talks regarding new museums policy. Federal government initiatives could help reverse the cycle of underfunding, loss of public awareness, deteriorating infrastructure and loss of cultural property.

We ask you to urgently pursue the creation of a new Canadian Museums Policy and to restore and increase funding to the Museums Assistance Programme or equivalent. It is not in any way hyperbole to say that the survival of the material of Canada's cultural heritage hangs in the balance.

Yours sincerely,

John McElhone  
President, CAC