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Valoree McKay
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February 12, 2015

Dear Ms. McKay,

Thank you for your letter dated December 10. I apologize for the delay in responding.

The cuts made to Statistics Canada by this Conservative Government are simply unacceptable. As you state in your letter, the data produced by the National Household Survey (NHS) is not only more costly, but is also of poorer quality. Many progressive economists assert that the poor quality data and inherent selection bias are the reasons that the Conservative government can claim that income inequality is improving. As I am sure you are aware, data collected from tax forms submitted to the Canada Revenue Agency shows the exact opposite; income inequality is getting worse.

This is just one example of how the lack of high quality data is affecting this government's ability to create public policy that reflects the realities of all Canadians, not just wealthy Conservative donors. This is why New Democrats have been fighting for Statistics Canada; first to keep the mandatory long-form census, and then to restore it. Mr. Hsu's bill for the most part is a good bill. Although I had concerns on the allowance for political interference in Mr. Hsu's bill, I still voted to send it to committee and allow further study. Unfortunately, the Conservative government refused to vote to allow further study, so that the damage done by the elimination of the mandatory long-form census could be examined at committee. Regretfully, this caused the bill to be defeated at second reading.

Bill C-626 contained many of the provisions that my colleague, Brian Masse (MP Windsor West) included in his bill C-346: *An Act to amend the Statistics Act (Chief Statistician and mandatory long-form census)* including removing ministerial oversight from the Chief Statistician, reinstating the mandatory long form census, and removing the penalty of imprisonment under the *Statistics Act*.

RECEIVED FEB 24 2015



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I spoke on this bill on January 29, and have attached the transcript of my speech for your reference. Restoring Statistics Canada is something that I personally feel strongly about, and something that New Democrats are committed to doing.

Thank you again for you letter and statement on Statistics Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peggy Nash'. The signature is stylized with large, flowing letters and a prominent initial 'P'.

Peggy Nash
Official Opposition Industry Critic

Enclosure:

Excerpt from Hansard Number 165: Thursday, Jan. 29, 2015

Excerpted from Hansard Number 165 for Thursday, January 29, 2015:

(1730)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on this bill today. Bill C-626 concerns the Statistics Act and Statistics Canada.

I am glad to follow on the heels of my colleague on the government side because, frankly, the government has such a sorry record of denying science, ignoring evidence and silencing experts with whom it disagrees. It is more prone to ideologically based decisions rather than evidence based decisions, and the evidence of it stifling science is just proof of that.

Many of my constituents in Parkdale—High Park have contacted me. They are very concerned about the impact on the quality of the statistics in Canada and their impact on the important social programs that we deliver in Canada. They include everything from immigration and refugee policy and labour statistics, right down to whether we will charge fees for certain programs in local communities across the country.

The bill we are debating today follows on the heels of bills from two NDP colleagues during the government's time, my colleagues from London—Fanshawe and Windsor West. They introduced similar bills. It really comes down to the fact that the New Democrats believe in good data. We believe it is essential to have good data to make government work. Having good data allows a government to effectively target and evaluate programs in order to improve service quality and lower the cost of the programs we deliver.

The NDP fought tooth and nail to prevent the Conservatives from eliminating the long-form census. The NDP believes that the long-form census must be restored in order to provide social scientists, governments and business with the data they need.

Here is a brief bit of history. The modern census was created in 1971. It was taken every fifth year until 2006, and it included some very short, basic questions, such as age and marital status, as well as some longer questions on housing and socio-economic factors. Response to the census was mandatory, and it carried penalties, including fines and possible imprisonment, for failing to respond or knowingly providing false information. This was to ensure the integrity of the data, so people filled it out completely and accurately.

In June, 2010, the Government of Canada quietly announced that it would be eliminating the long-form census without any consultation with stakeholders, the users, or even government agencies, and it replaced it with a voluntary survey, the national household survey. This created a huge uproar from municipalities, researchers and others, including the chief statistician, who ended up resigning when the long-form census was replaced.

In the past, these mandatory surveys typically had a response rate of about 94%. That is a very high response rate. In contrast, the voluntary survey has a response rate of 68%. That is a lot of missing data. We are finding that rural communities are especially under-represented. There are also certain parts of the country out west, east and north, as well as first nations communities, and some very low and high-income people not filling out the census.

Under the mandatory census—and I remind my Conservative colleague across the aisle about this—not one person has ever gone to jail for not filling out the mandatory census. This census had a 94% response rate. There are a couple of people who refused to fill out the form because they disagreed with certain government policies and it went to court, but they were not convicted. Someone else received mandatory community service as a result of not filling it out, but not one person ever went to jail.

The Conservatives eliminating the long form census to avoid mandatory prison sentences was completely irrelevant. It is a red herring.

(1735)

It seems as though the intended consequence is that we would not have reliable statistics telling us that in fact inequality in Canada is rising. We do not know the level of labour force participation on first nation reserves. We cannot tell where social programs would be best implemented and be most effective because we cannot get proper, accurate, up-to-date data.

Other countries have tried to eliminate their long form census. None has replaced it with a voluntary census, as this government has done. That is a big waste of money right there. The U.S. tried it, but found the data so unreliable it went back to the mandatory census. What do they know that these guys are ignoring?

We are finding that not only are the data unreliable and the results poor, but it also costs more than a mandatory census did. That is unbelievable. These guys are such bad managers. The Auditor General has reported that the national household survey, their voluntary survey, cost \$30 million more than the mandatory census, not including the \$22 million that was spent to switch over to the new format. These guys are great at spending money, at losing money and wasting money for nothing. That money could have been more effectively invested in creating jobs, in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, in helping young people and taking people out of poverty. I do not know what makes these guys tick.

It is not just New Democrats who are criticizing the government on this. In the Report On Business in today's *The Globe and Mail* there is an article by Tavia Grant. She says:

The cancellation of the mandatory long-form census has damaged research in key areas, from how immigrants are doing in the labour market to how the middle class is faring, while making it more difficult for cities to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely, planners and researchers say.

She also references in the private sector the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, whose network represents 200,000 businesses across the country. It is publicly calling on the federal government to restore the mandatory long form census. We have been saying this all along.

She also goes on to say:

It's now tougher to know whether free programs, such as swimming lessons or skills training, are being offered in the most high-need communities. It's more difficult to plan subsidized child care. And there are now "huge gaps" in the ability to understand health trends in... [populations].

It is affecting city finances, because cities have to spend extra money to buy data privately, rather than having access to good-quality, more cost-effective public data. The government is downloading. It makes no sense.

Let me just conclude by saying that New Democrats believe that good data is essential to make government work. We also believe in science, unlike our counterparts across the aisle. We believe that good data allows government to effectively target and evaluate programs and thus improve the service quality while lowering costs.

We fought tooth and nail to prevent the Conservatives from eliminating the long form census. We believe the long form census must be restored to provide social scientists, governments, and businesses the data they need.

We also believe that the world is not flat. It is round, and we believe that greenhouse gas emissions are being created by the activity of people in the world. We know some really good scientists who could help our counterparts on the other side understand these things.