

The outlook for a restoration of Canadian government funding for international Canadian Studies*

BY NIK NANOS

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It has been more than a decade since the Government of Canada terminated support for international Canadian Studies. We have all witnessed the decline in Canada-related activity among scholars and students around the world that this decision has caused. And we all appreciate how Canada's profile in the international community, so critically important for the country's soft-power diplomatic capacity, has diminished in the wake of this unfortunate decision.

I believe that Canada's stature and interests on the global stage are best served when the country, its culture, history, economy, and society are understood and appreciated by citizens and decision-makers around the world. In 2018, together with John Graham, a former Canadian diplomat who was one of the designers of the original Understanding Canada program that funded the activities of Canadianists in other countries, I helped found the Advancing Canada Coalition with the aim of advocating for a restoration of such funding (advancingcanada.org). We have attracted an impressive array of supporters from all walks of Canadian life to help us in this mission.

UPDATE ON ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Today I'd like to give you a brief update on our activities, briefly review our prospects at this time, and suggest some potential next steps in our efforts. After four years of strategic dialogue at the very top echelons of the Trudeau government as volunteers, I regret to say that we have not yet achieved our objective. We have been close to breaking through on a couple of occasions, but in each case some crisis or extenuating circumstance bumped us off the government's list of priorities. In particular, COVID, and the stress that the pandemic placed on our country's budget, made the adoption of new spending programs, even ones as modest and cost-effective as ours, extremely difficult.

Along with our targeted efforts, we have also participated in several initiatives that are of a more public nature. Our testimony before the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in its investigations into Canada's cultural diplomacy, as outlined in its report entitled *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy*, was in part responsible for one of the committee's eight recommendations that encouraged Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to "support the creation of a modernized Canadian Studies program that would contribute to knowledge about Canada in the world."

A MODEST PROPOSAL

Looking forward, the general political and budgetary climate for our cause is not particularly encouraging. Nonetheless, the Advancing Canada Coalition intends to continue to push for restored funding for international Canadian Studies.

As a suggestion, the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) and its member associations might consider developing and advancing projects that fall within three geographic areas where GAC has established priority initiatives. These priorities already have in place budget lines that might be tapped by Canadian Studies proposals. Proposals from the international Canadian Studies community that have the potential to support and advance Canada's interests arguably have a greater chance of securing funding than ones unrelated to the country's foreign policy. Three of these stand out as particularly promising: North America, where the recent election of Donald Trump will ensure that trade issues will loom large in Canada's future; the European Union, where the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is still in the process of gaining ratification in the member states; and Asia, where Canada has been a founding member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Though the short-term outlook may not be particularly promising, the Advancing Canada Coalition will continue to look for ways to advance the cause of restoring funding for Canadianists around the world. We remain confident that the tremendous value that is added to Canada's soft-power diplomatic capacity by the growth in knowledge and awareness of Canada, resulting from the activities of scholars, cultural producers, and students around the world, will once again be recognized by decision-makers in Ottawa. ■

NOTE

- * As summarized by session moderator Prof. Munroe Eagles, former president of the International Council for Canadian Studies and member of the Advancing Canada Coalition.

REFERENCE

Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. (2019, June). *Cultural diplomacy at the front stage of Canada's foreign policy*. <https://sencanada.ca/en/info-page/parl-42-1/aefa-cultural-diplomacy/>