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## The Conservative Party's Bad Faith on Canada Summer Jobs Attestation

March 14, 2018

A little-publicized Parliamentary motion by a Conservative Member of Parliament is attempting to undermine the new attestation requirement for the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program. Debated on March 1<sup>st</sup> in the House of Commons, the motion relies on a wrong interpretation of the attestation made in bad faith. The debate revealed not only that the Conservatives are exploiting the issue to attack the Liberal government, but that Conservative MPs are unnecessarily depriving thousands of students of summer jobs.

Conservative MP Karen Vecchio (Elgin-Middlesex-London) introduced the [motion in Parliament on March 1](#). It was debated for over two hours and will come to a vote on March 19. The motion reads:

“That, in the opinion of the House, organizations that engage in non-political non-activist work, such as feeding the homeless, helping refugees, and giving kids an opportunity to go to camp, should be able to access Canada Summer Jobs funding regardless of their private convictions and regardless of whether or not they choose to sign the application attestation.”

Organizations applying for funding to hire summer students must check off an attestation box on the CSJ application form that requires them to agree to “respect” Charter and human rights for the purposes of the CSJ program, as well as attest that their “core mandate” does not involve undermining human rights. (see Sidebar for explanation). The listed rights in the application include the right to abortion and LGBTQ2 rights. Although some confusion arose when the attestation requirement was first introduced in December 2017 due to unclear wording, the Liberals issued a clarification a month later, with several examples of eligibility.

### What does the CSJ attestation mean?

- “Respect” means that employers agree to not use Summer Jobs funding for activities that actively undermine or oppose any of the listed rights – whether they agree with those rights or not.
- “Core mandate” refers not to the group's beliefs or values, but to their primary activity. This means anti-abortion groups are ineligible because they primarily oppose women's rights.
- All groups with a different or more general mandate, including churches and religious groups, are eligible even if they are against abortion.
- Any group would be refused funding if they discriminate in hiring students, or if the summer job itself involves undermining individual human rights.

The new guidance made it clear that almost any organization is eligible to apply for Canada Summer Jobs – including most groups who still mistakenly believe they aren't. This gap is largely the fault of Conservative MPs who have failed to reassure their constituents, and instead have turned the issue into a political weapon against the Liberals at the expense of students hoping to obtain summer jobs. ◆

*For highlights of the debate, and a critique of comments by MPs from all parties, see the following pages.*

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## Critique of March 1 Parliamentary debate on Canada Summer Jobs attestation requirement

March 14, 2018

### ***Debate Highlights***

Key points from the [March 1 Hansard debate](#) are summarized and critiqued below. The debate began when Conservative MP Karen Vecchio tabled a motion calling for non-enforcement of the new attestation requirement in the Canada Summer Jobs program. (Applicants are obligated to attest they will respect human rights by not using CSJ funding to undermine them.)

Two quotes encapsulate the bad faith nature of the debate by Conservatives:

**Andy Fillmore** (Liberal, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Democratic Institutions, [1620 mark](#)):  
“...I am so confounded by the mendacious invective from the Conservative benches, and from the leadership, that I hardly know where to start. I come from a long career in public service and I have seen my share of sophistry and oratorical parlour tricks, where elected members were trying to confuse the public into believing something other than what was true, other than what was being proposed. What I fear here is that the overreach by the Conservative benches on this matter is so great that it is doing damage to the very institution of public service. Misleading smart, good people, good organizations into believing that they should not sign the attestation, and that they are therefore ineligible for funding, not only harms those institutions but it harms the students.”

**Chris Bittle** (Liberal, St. Catherines, [1550 mark](#)): “...what makes me angry is that member after member from the Conservative caucus is standing up or Tweeting misinformation that is leading to organizations losing out on funding. This misinformation .... is leading to these organizations falsely believing that they are no longer eligible for funding. Every summer camp that kids do not get to attend or meals on wheels program that is short a driver in their ridings is thanks to the opposition and the misinformation that is being spread. This is being made worse by the fact that they are only doing this to pander to their base. The farther their leader drags them away from the centre requires them to go looking for new votes. The general public, especially young Canadians, should not suffer because the Leader of the Opposition is trolling for votes.”

***Not just a few extremists:*** Some Conservative and NDP MPs mentioned that it was just a few extremists abusing the CSJ who should be denied. But [over 60 anti-choice groups](#) have received CSJ funding, while an unknown number of other groups have been discriminating against LGBTQ2 youth in hiring. Also, it was the lack of policy that led to a lawsuit by three anti-choice groups last year, resulting in the Liberals having to [return funding to the three groups](#). The attestation requirement was designed to prevent applications from anti-choice groups and others that work primarily to oppose human rights, as well as make it easier to scrutinize all applications and identify ineligible groups or jobs.

***Not a slippery slope to charity revocation:*** Several Conservative MPs raised slippery slope concerns about the revocation of charitable status from groups who disagree with the government on human rights, even though the criteria for charitable status are vastly different than the CSJ criteria. For example, churches and religious organizations qualify under “advancement of religion” so their charity status is completely safe.

***Dubious charitable status for many groups:*** Conservative MP Lisa Raitt (Milton) also claimed that all charities should be automatically approved for Canada Summer Jobs funding because the CRA has already extensively screened them. But [76% of anti-choice groups have charitable tax status](#), with most obtaining it decades ago when abortion rights were not yet [firmly established in Charter and case law](#). The “charitable” purpose of anti-choice groups to oppose abortion no longer has any public benefit and their status should be revoked.

The charitable status of some other groups also seems dubious, along with CRA’s screening processes. As NDP MP Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay) aptly noted:

“...just because one gets charitable status does not mean that one should get money to help young people. I would not give it to the Fraser Institute, although God knows how it managed to get charitable status in the first place.”

## ***Conservatives in the Debate***

Here’s some revealing takeaways from the Conservative side of the March 1 Hansard debate:

- Groups’ refusal to sign the attestation, or the belief they are ineligible, appeared to be a problem confined mostly to Conservative ridings.
- Conservative MPs named many organizations in their ridings who they said couldn’t apply for CSJ funding. *In fact, most if not all are eligible.*
  - Several Conservative MPs reported that municipal governments in their ridings are refusing to sign the attestation. *The MPs failed to reassure them of their eligibility, or even inform them that municipalities are required to not only respect but **uphold** Charter rights.*
  - MP Harold Albrecht (Kitchener-Conestoga) said one group didn’t want their name mentioned in the debate for fear of retribution by the Liberals for speaking out. *Albrecht apparently failed to inform the group that their fear was unfounded.*
  - MP Randy Hoback (Prince Albert) said he will not be participating in CSJ this year. *This means that Hoback is depriving many youth of summer jobs to make a political point.*
- Conservative MPs cited freedom of speech, conscience, thought, and religion, *but neglected to mention women’s and LGBTQ2 Charter rights, including equality, security of the person, life, liberty.*
- Conservative MPs used the following terms to describe the Liberal government’s protection of Charter rights via the attestation. *This language disrespects the Charter and demeans the rights of women and LGBTQ2 communities.*
  - Orwellian
  - Bigoted, intolerant, unconstitutional
  - Liberal agenda / Liberal values
  - Social agenda
  - Government ideology
  - Rigid partisan agenda
  - Trudeau’s opinions
  - Values test
  - Ideological warfare / ideological straitjacket
  - Ideological litmus test / ideological purity test
  - Compelled speech
- Conservative MP Arnold Viersen (Peace River-Westlock) referred to sexual orientation and gender identity as a “lifestyle”

- Being against women's right to abortion or LGBTQ2 rights was represented by several MPs as an example of "diversity" of thought that must be respected.

### ***Liberals in the Debate***

The Liberals ably corrected the many distortions and misconceptions of the CSJ program made by Conservatives. They went further by accusing the Conservatives of spreading misinformation, politicizing, scare-mongering, and making students and organizations suffer. Many groups won't apply for CSJ funding now because of this faux controversy, and the overreach by the Conservatives is damaging the institution of public service.

Some other highlights:

- The Conservatives supported C-16 on gender identity but now want to deny jobs to trans people.
- Conservative MPs didn't speak out when Harper denied funding for needed medical services to women based on an anti-abortion viewpoint. A Liberal government can refuse to pay groups to hire youth to protest abortion outside clinics or by handing out grotesque pamphlets.
- The Supplemental information issued by the Liberals makes the attestation clear.
- The Conservatives are ignoring the definition of "core mandate."
- The attestation is about activities, not beliefs.
- Liberals worked with constituencies to help applicants.
- When the correct definitions are explained to faith-based organizations who have concerns, their concerns are lifted.
- Many faith groups in Liberal ridings have signed the attestation.
- Major organizations Canada wide support the attestation.
- Application rates are higher than last year.
- The government doubled the CSJ funding.
- The new/expanded CSJ program focuses on youth with barriers, career focus, STEM, justice and equality.
- A quality work experience is important – CSJ must not be used to undermine the rights of women, LGBT people, and immigrants.
- CSJ needs to have full integrity and reflect the society we live in today.
- The CSJ has been abused by some groups – LGBTQ2 youth were barred from summer camps (e.g., Young Life Canada), and the Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform (CCBR) used funding to pay students to display/distribute aborted fetus imagery.
- Andrew Scheer opposes LGBT rights and abortion rights and is indebted to the CCBR and other anti-choice groups who helped him get elected as party leader.

### ***New Democrats in the Debate***

NDP MPs opposed the Conservative motion but criticized the Liberals for the "vague" and "very unclear" wording and their "ham-fisted" rollout of the attestation requirement. Some other highlights:

- This is a culture war between the Liberals and Conservatives.
- Odd that Conservatives say they're here to uphold the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms but started this debate to defend their ideology that works against women's rights.
- The CSJ must support human rights.

- Instead of the attestation, Liberals should have said no to extremist agendas. Only a few bad or extremist groups were abusing the CSJ. *Not true, over 60 anti-choice groups have obtained funding, other groups were abusing it too, and the attestation requirement was needed for better scrutiny.*
- Not all charities should have charitable tax status.
- NDP has been working with applicants.
- Some MPs showed a lack of judgement in the past in recommending CSJ grants.

Christine Moore (Abitibi-Témiscamingue) gave a good overview of how MPs are involved in summer jobs grants (at 1650 in [transcript](#)).

The NDP has always been a strongly pro-choice party, but it's worth noting that since 2010, [ten NDP MPs have funded anti-choice groups](#) through the CSJ program. Most amounts were small and many groups were "crisis pregnancy centres" so it's possible that MPs were fooled by their deceptive appearance. However, MPs Paul Dewar and Mike Sullivan gave funds to Campaign Life Coalition, an extremist political group that wants a total ban on abortion.

### ***Greens in the Debate***

Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands) says she will vote for the Conservative motion "because I believe the attestation box was a mistake, but not because for one second I will surrender on a woman's right to equal choice and equal rights."

Unfortunately, May overlooked the fact that the attestation requirement was designed to mostly exclude anti-choice groups, who would otherwise continue to get CSJ funding to promote the denial of women's human rights. She mentioned a Bible camp and a church in her riding who have concerns about the attestation, without saying whether she reassured them that they are both eligible.

**Addendum:** May sent us the following clarification on March 16:

*"I did not have a chance to say much on the floor of the House (I was not given a speaking opportunity), but I made sure they [organizations like the Hope Bay Bible Camp –H.P.] knew they were eligible. I had to really twist their arms to check that box.*

*"Though I believe Minister Hajdu's intentions were good, a more appropriate response would have been greater discretion for Ministers and clear communication through their departments that political groups who harass women seeking their legal right to abortion should never receive funding. If the attestation box were designed by Harper to screen out certain views, I would be just as concerned. It is a bad precedent to have a checkbox at all."*