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Oda Sitting on Report that Rebuts Government Claims Axed Volunteer Program was a Success: NDP MP

OTTAWA - Heritage Minister Bev Oda is refusing to release a positive audit report on important volunteer programs that were axed last fall under her watch. The Summative Evaluation, obtained by NDP MP Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay), clearly shows that the Community Participation Programs (CPP) including the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) were necessary, useful, and cost-effective.

The audit, undertaken as a routine procedure for programs of this nature, would normally be made public. However, the positive review stands in stark contrast to Conservative rhetoric from last fall that claimed their funding cuts were targeted at programs that were "wasteful", "inefficient" and "out of touch with average Canadians." Therefore the report was only discovered as the result of an access to information request.

Angus, the NDP's Heritage Critic, says Oda needs to explain the gap between the reality presented in the report and Conservative spin with respect to the CVI. "This report vindicates volunteer organizations from across Canada who were singled out by the Conservatives as wasteful and out of touch. Bev Oda stood by and did nothing to defend a Heritage Department success story. It's time she came clean with the volunteer sector and told them why she walked away from them when they needed her most," said Angus.

The report, written in November 2006, clearly shows that in addition to being very active, the programs were successfully providing support to a voluntary sector under "considerable stress." Further, the report states that the lack of support for volunteer organizations in Canada is "impacting on their ability to provide service to Canadians."

Given the nature of the report's conclusions, the only reasonable action for the Conservatives to undertake is to reinstate full funding for the program.

"Bev Oda owes ordinary Canadians who choose to volunteer their time to help others an explanation about why she doesn't support their initiatives," said Angus. "She needs to release the report for all to see and take responsibility for the damage her government has done."

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