



Policy paper number 5:

**A determinedly art-friendly
– and artist-friendly –
Federal government**

January 20, 2012

Dear friend,

A friend of mine once wrote a thoughtful paper on the cultural aspirations of Quebecers, including an image that I think applies to Canada as a whole:

We are the sugar cube that stubbornly refuses to dissolve in the hot cup of coffee we find ourselves in.

That is true for Quebec, which has miraculously found a way to build and nurture a flourishing French-language culture in an English-speaking North American cultural ocean. It is also true of English-speaking Canada in all its diversity and complexity.

Our cultural institutions — and our artists — provide Canada with its "village square" to come together, to tell each other our stories, and to share our values.

Our cultural industries are also some of the most efficient job-creators in our economy, and are part of the foundation of a more equal, more prosperous value-added economy. Smart governments promote the arts because it is smart economic policy. Other governments — like this conservative government — prey on the arts and artists to fuel angry fundraising letters to their base.

The arts sector is complex. In this paper, I will state my core commitment and then highlight just a few of the most important initiatives I believe an NDP government should take:

I propose we say early and often that ours will be an arts-friendly, arts-focused government... and an artist-friendly, artist-focused government.

**A key issue for all of Canada's key cultural industries is access to capital. Quebec has met this challenge with a model that merits wider application;
It is time for Canada to turn the lights back on in its public broadcasting; and
It is time in Canada to get serious about supporting and promoting the foundations of all of our cultural industries: artists themselves.**

This is the fifth in a series of policy papers I've released during this leadership campaign. You can find all of them at www.briantopp.ca. If you liked this one, please forward it to others you think might be interested. I would welcome your comments or suggestions. And if I've persuaded you to support my campaign, please get in touch with me through my website to volunteer or donate.

All the best,
Brian Topp

A core commitment:

Let's begin with a core commitment — our party should dedicate itself to the principle that the Government of Canada, for both cultural and economic reasons, should be arts-friendly and artist-friendly.

This is in stark contrast to the Conservative government, which sometimes panders to the worst instincts of their party's political base.

Access to capital:

Canadian film and television, book, magazine, music, performing arts and interactive companies tend to be under-capitalized and financially vulnerable. This is a result of the lack of venture capital in the Canadian economy, and the economic realities of a cultural sector whose key markets, at least in the English-language, are overwhelmingly dominated by American competitors.

The province of Quebec recognized this issue long ago, and has steadily built up a targeted equity investment fund as part of the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC). The investment fund partners with Quebec-based cultural enterprises, making them more bankable, more stable, and more competitive.

I propose a cultural industries investment fund for the rest of Canada, and a matching offer of federal support for SODEC to help promote its own work. The federal government's program of targeted tax credits and other supports in the cultural industries would be reviewed to ensure they complement this new approach.

Turning the lights on in public broadcasting:

Canada's public broadcaster has been under siege for many years, as successive Liberal and Conservative governments have undermined its important place in Canadian culture. The issues aren't all financial; the CBC faces a fundamental challenge in holding onto its audience in the 1000-channel television universe, with an infinite number of alternatives on the internet. This competition means that our public broadcaster needs to fundamentally up its game. Because our public broadcaster is the one sure place for Canadian creators and storytellers to be heard and seen. We must concentrate on fulfilling that essential mandate -- not just selling advertising in competition with privately-owned sports and entertainment channels.

I propose a careful, top-to-bottom rethink of the CBC's television and internet service; the re-launch of Canadian public broadcasting on a model that will work in the 21st century — and then a substantial, sustained investment in that model.

One model worth considering: a lean, infrastructure-light, on-screen-focused, multi-channel public

broadcasting offer, in which viewers can see what they want to see when they want to see it. We know what Canadians want from their public broadcaster: objective and authoritative news, documentaries and public affairs reporting, Canadian film, Canadian drama and comedy, children's programming, Canadian sports and the performing arts. In place of trying to hold its entire audience to a single channel, like it did in 1959, perhaps public broadcasting in Canada needs to put a diverse and rich multi-channel offer before Canadians -- as many other public broadcasters are doing successfully.

I propose a review and modernization of the *Broadcasting Act*, and some clear dialogue with the CRTC (perhaps in the form of a Cabinet directive) to ensure the Act is enforced – including in its requirements that broadcasters (conventional, cable and internet) earn their access to the Canadian market through an appropriate commitment to Canadian content.

Supporting and promoting artists:

To its considerable credit, the government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney adopted Status of the Artist legislation. That legislation is now almost 30 years old, and in need of review and modernization.

I propose our party commit to updating and modernizing federal status of the artist legislation and, in the course of doing so, review how basic federal income support and taxation policies (pensions, EI, the issue of income averaging) work for people pursuing artistic careers.