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[Candidate]  
Liberal Leadership Campaign  
[Address]  
[Address]

February 14, 2013

**Subject: Your views on Library and Archives Canada?**

Dear [Liberal Leadership Candidate]:

The Canadian library community is distressed by the attack of recent federal governments on our national library. As a result of ongoing funding cuts, Library and Archives Canada has abandoned its central mission of systematically and comprehensively collecting and preserving the documentary heritage of our country, to the detriment of today's researchers and of future generations. How are Canadians to know themselves and their history without the essential services provided by a true national library? A backgrounder on the issue is attached to this letter.

We ask you to consider how Library and Archives Canada (LAC) might fare under your leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada. We hope that you will take the time to consider your position with respect to the following questions:

In your view, what is the place of heritage and culture in the overall welfare of Canada?

Do you believe in the importance of a national library with a core mission to safeguard Canada's documentary heritage?

Would you be prepared to see that LAC is adequately funded and given the resources to fulfill its full mandate?

The Canadian library community looks to Library and Archives Canada for leadership in a number of key areas, including the identification, acquisition, description, dissemination, and preservation of our national documentary heritage. We look to Library and Archives Canada to fulfill all

the roles of a true national library, including participation in the development of international standards that will stand the test of time in service to Canadians, and the administration of programs (such as document delivery) that support the work of partners and researchers across the country. Instead, LAC has rescinded its membership in the prestigious Association of Research Libraries and discontinued interlibrary loan services, to name just two actions that will have long-term negative effects on Canadians and the Canadian library sector. LAC is retreating from its legislated mission and Canadians are losing—in a real sense though its doors remain open—an institution of vital importance to them.

The Atlantic Provinces Library Association counts close to 400 personal and institutional members drawn from public, academic, school, and special libraries scattered throughout the region. Our members, and library professionals across the country, are very concerned about the state of Library and Archives Canada. We wish to know your views on this important issue and look forward to your response.

Thank you for your time and all good wishes,

Lou Duggan  
President

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### **BACKGROUND: The State of Library and Archives Canada**

Library and Archives Canada (founded in 1953) proudly displays its mission for all to see on its website, to wit:

- To preserve the documentary heritage of Canada for the benefit of present and future generations;
- To be a source of enduring knowledge accessible to all, contributing to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Canada;
- To facilitate in Canada cooperation among communities involved in the acquisition, preservation and diffusion of knowledge;
- To serve as the continuing memory of the government of Canada and its institutions.

On this same website can be found a statement by LAC Deputy Head Daniel Caron to the effect that, "...the new environment is totally decentralized and our monopoly as stewards of the national documentary heritage is over."

The above statement clearly jars with the legislated mission of LAC, and it also reveals a complete lack of understanding of the role of a national library, as well as of the Canadian library landscape. For one thing, the LAC has never had a “monopoly” on the stewardship of Canadian heritage and culture and, for another, the activity of collecting and preserving has always been decentralized, though not in the manner suggested as ideal by Dr. Caron.

In the past, LAC has exercised, to the best of its ability, its core responsibility of ensuring that the documentary heritage of this country is consistently and comprehensively collected and preserved, while other libraries in the country – academic, public, and special – have played their part by collecting more selectively, based on their own local or regional mandates. Canadians could feel secure that valuable documents would not be lost with commitment for their survival existing at multiple levels. This has not been a case of wasteful duplication of effort: the fragility of the human record is such that preservation requires engagement and vigilance at many levels. However, the national library is unique in its mandate, with other types of libraries having mandates that are at once broader (all areas of human knowledge) and narrower (serving local, regional needs).

Under the guise of “modernization”, LAC has adopted a new service model based on partnerships – new partnerships for now mostly imagined, yet to be forged. The “cooperation among communities involved in the acquisition, preservation and diffusion of knowledge” that LAC’s mission speaks of already exists, in a different form to the one imagined by LAC (a more formalized Pan Canadian Documentary Heritage Network). Many of the communities referred to, and certainly libraries, already cooperate amongst themselves to the great advantage of the people they serve. Other libraries do their jobs and expect LAC to do the same.

While other national libraries have pursued without fail their traditional mission of collecting their own country’s documentary heritage (in all formats), LAC has sharply reduced—and even declared a moratorium for a time on—the acquisition of new materials. While other national libraries have made great strides in digitizing their collections thereby exposing their treasures once hidden away in stacks and archives, our national library has virtually stood still. One need only compare the websites of two other national libraries—those of Australia and New Zealand—to ours and it becomes immediately apparent and glaring how very far behind Canada has fallen.

While other countries have invested heavily in their national libraries to re-invigorate their services and showcase their vibrant cultures by taking advantage of new technologies, LAC has used technological advance as an excuse to divest itself of its responsibilities. Our national library has become a national library in name only and an embarrassment on the world stage. Action is needed to reverse the situation before it is too late.