

December 17, 2008

Letter sent to Ministers, Leaders of the Opposition Parties and MPs,

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Consortium of Research (CCR) to ask that research and innovation be a major consideration in preparing the government's next budget and an integral component of any stimulus package put forward to strengthen Canada's economy.

The CCR is the largest organization in Canada whose primary concerns are the funding of research in all sectors and support for post-secondary education. Established in 1976, CCR consists of 18 organizations that represent 50,000 researchers and 400,000 students in all disciplines across Canada. These researchers are based in universities, government laboratories, and the private sector.

Our country is facing the worst downturn since the Great Depression. It is critical for government to revisit budgetary assumptions and consider innovative, effective mechanisms for aggressive investment in our economy and our future.

Research and innovation are today's version of the bricks and mortar infrastructure projects of the 1930s. In a global knowledge economy, the nations that will successfully weather the present crisis are those that will adopt investment packages that not only provide rapid stimulus to the economy but also have research and innovation components.

Basic scientific research in subatomic physics led to the development of today's ubiquitous worldwide web, itself the backbone of e-commerce and of global competitiveness. More recently, a powerful voice compression technology developed at the Université de Sherbrooke key part of the software used in more than one billion cell phones worldwide and has earned the university and its inventors millions of dollars each year in royalties and led to two spin-off companies. Canadian research led to the global emergence of business powerhouses such as Research in Motion and Open Text Corporation that are creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs, here at home, and re-investing in Canada to create research institutes and new possibilities for the training of new generations of highly-skilled Canadians.

In the international marketplace, the commercialization of new products and services is increasingly tied to the understanding of human behaviour and diversity. Global companies such as Xerox and Nokia use social and anthropological research to examine product, improve customer service and guide the development of new generation technologies and features.

Research investments have a direct and immediate impact across sectors and in communities everywhere in Canada. Competitive research is carried out through the employment of undergraduate and graduate students, laboratory technicians, post-doctoral fellows, statistical and IT assistants. It also requires the building of state-of-the-art facilities and the purchase of goods and services upon which their work depends. Used to pay salaries, build world-class labs and purchase scientific equipment, research grants have a direct and significant impact right across the country, generating both economic activity and tax revenue.

Increasing the funding to all of Canada's granting councils will have a direct and immediate effect on new employment for people and on making Canadian communities sustainable. Increasing funding to programs that help keep our industries competitive— such as the Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP)—would also have similar positive effects. In addition to the immediate economic benefits resulting from employment, research programs create opportunities to train new generations of experts and highly qualified personnel who go on to join Canada's workforce and generate further and significant contributions to industry, the economy and society.

Though harsh economic times might suggest a need to restrain funding or to focus investment in traditional projects, it is critical to understand that a reduction to research support— even if only for a few years—comes at a huge future cost to the economy and will cause damage to Canada's research and innovation capacity that could take years to repair.

This is a time for Canada to recognize the significant potential and opportunities that result from a strategic re-investment in our ability to innovate, to commercialize new ideas, and to promote social progress. Our national ability to generate new ideas and support scientific inquiry is core to developing the industries and institutions that sustain and grow our economy and our society. These are the fundamentals that will continue to define Canada as a partner in the global economy and a leader among democratic nations.

We look forward to following up our recommendations through meetings and further discussion.

Yours truly,

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