



Canadian Federation
of Earth Sciences | *Fédération canadienne
des sciences de la Terre*

Open Letter

Calgary, February 7, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2
pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister,

The Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences / *Fédération Canadienne des Sciences de la Terre* is an umbrella organization representing more than a dozen member and observer organizations comprising about 20,000 Earth Scientists. Our membership is employed in the petroleum, mining, environmental and geotechnical industries, and in fundamental Earth Science research in government and academic institutions. CFES/FCST is quite concerned about the announced budget cuts for the three Granting Councils, and specifically for NSERC. We understand that these are times in which governments must carefully set priorities in order to stimulate an ailing economy, but we do not accept that the prime motor of the knowledge economy is threatened to the point that Canadian prosperity will be at risk.

The budget provides a \$750m increase in support of the Canada Foundation for Innovation (a much needed boost to infrastructure) and a \$90m increase in support of graduate scholarships and industrial R&D internships (a welcome support for students). However, the budget also contains a \$150m cut to the Granting Councils, justified on the basis of 'efficiencies'. The combination of these three initiatives provides Canadian research with infrastructure and training, but takes away experienced researchers to use the infrastructure and provide the training.

Canada already lags behind other G7 countries in investments in science. The OECD December 2008 Outlook reports that Canada's combined (government and private industry) R&D investment is only 70% that of the remaining G7. The same document also shows that the Canadian population of researchers (as a percentage of the total population) is only 90% of that of the G7 average. This number may not

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seem alarmingly lower than average, but the Granting Council budget cuts especially threaten the work of active researchers, something that will result in Canadian scientists seeking a more supportive research environment abroad. During the past 8 years, Canada has had somewhat of an advantage for attracting foreign researchers, but the election of President Barack Obama will quickly change that situation when he “restores science to its rightful place”. The economic stimulus package in the US contains billions of dollars for, among others, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and the US Geological Survey (singled out for several hundred million dollars).

Research is a key competitive asset in the global world of science and technology and thus a key element to enable a nation to maintain its competitive edge. Increasing R&D competitiveness in Asia has already been shown to have an adverse effect on the innovative capacity of western nations. The budget mentions “Canada’s leading role in creating world-leading research capacity”, “attracting and retaining top talent”, and “having the best educated most skilled and flexible work force in the world”. None of this is reality today and all of this will remain a wish rather than a reality as a result of the 2009 Budget. Instead, we fear that Canada will fall farther behind and become an insignificant world player.

We applaud funding for new Arctic research facilities and we have applauded your \$100m GEMS initiative last Fall, but infrastructure will sit idle if sufficient numbers of Earth Scientists cannot be trained to do the necessary jobs and if less thorough research can be carried out by inspired and inspiring Earth Scientists whose reputation, due to lack of proper funding, will decline in the international arena. We urge you to direct your Federal Science Departments to reallocate funding internally by transferring \$250m of the proposed increase in the CFI budget to the Granting Councils. We also urge you to introduce new and increased tax incentives for private businesses to invest in R&D. Such measures could just help to retain our scientists and keep research going at a somewhat acceptable level in the immediate future.

Sincerely,



Bill Mercer, President

CC: Hon. **Jim Prentice**, Minister of Environment; Hon. **Gail Shea**, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans; Hon. **Tony Clement**, Industry Minister; Hon. **Lisa Raitt**, Minister of Natural Resources; Hon. **Gary Goodyear**, Minister of Science and Technology, Hon. **Diane Finley**, Minister of Human Resources and Skills development