

THE JOHN MCKAY REPORT

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WILL THE 2011 CENSUS GIVE US A TRUE PICTURE OF CANADA?

Despite an unprecedented outcry from a broad cross-section of Canadians against axing the mandatory long census, the Conservatives continue to put ideology before facts by digging their heels in. To show just how little our government cares about facts – including those collected in the census – consider their arguments for getting rid of it:

“21,000 Canadians registered ‘Jedi knight’ as a religion in the 2001 census” - PMO spokesperson Dimitri Soudas, July 18

The Jedi census campaign was an email campaign to get “Jedi” recognized as an official religion. With a voluntary long form census, people who want to make a point will be more willing to respond, not less. This would skew the numbers even further away from the facts.

“Government should not threaten prosecution or jail time to force Canadians to divulge unnecessary private and personal information.” - Dimitri Soudas, July 18

The census long form has existed for over thirty years and Canadians have not been jailed for it. The census short form is still mandatory. So is the Agriculture Census long form. Canadians do their civic duty and fill them out, because they realize that they are the one way to collect valid statistical information about our country.

“Canadians don’t want the government at their doorstep at 10 o’clock at night while they may be doing something in their bedroom, like reading, because government wants to know how many bedrooms they have.” – Dimitri Soudas, July 18

There are valid policy reasons for knowing the



size of Canadian homes, and the Conservatives shouldn’t fear-monger that census-takers will arrive at your door at night to find out what you’re doing. The long-form census arrives by mail. People who need help filling it out can be assisted over the phone or in person, as they wish.

“The state does not belong in the bedrooms of Canadians and Canadians must have the freedom to

choose if they want to answer it” – Maxime Bernier, July 18

The census has nothing to do invading your bedroom. In fact, Canadians can fill it out on their kitchen table.

“We’re there for the silent majority of Canadians.” – Maxime Bernier, July 18

This argument was used by Richard Nixon to justify the Vietnam War in the face of public opposition. We should get used to more arguments like this if census information becomes unreliable – because it will be more difficult to get an accurate picture of Canadians, and therefore easier for government to take actions that go against our wishes.



“The long-form is too expensive” – Conservative bloggers

The new voluntary long-form will cost \$30 million more than the mandatory status quo, while resulting in unreliable, unusable data – which means the Conservatives want us to pay more to get less.

“This is a methodology that Statistics Canada offered to us and if it’s good enough for Statistics Canada, it should be good enough for some of our critics.” – Minister Tony Clement, July 15

This is untrue. StatsCan recommended against eliminating the mandatory long-form, and Ivan Fellegi, the respected former head of Statistics Canada, has publicly spoken out against the change.

“Getting rid of the long form census will respect the privacy wishes of Canadians” – Tony Clement Statement, July 13

This isn’t about privacy. In 2007, the Auditor General had nothing but praise for Statistics Canada’s efforts to ensure that the individual data of Canadians was protected. Meanwhile, the Conservatives have maintained the mandatory Agriculture census, the mandatory Labour Force Survey, and mandatory data collection from the Canada Revenue Agency.

“To promote data accuracy, this voluntary survey will be sent to a larger cross-section of households than the old long-form census.” – Tony Clement Statement, July 13

In a voluntary system, people will self-select, which means no matter how many people you send it to, the data would be useless. It could not be compared to previous years and the disadvantaged, unemployed, poor, Aboriginal and other communities would be less likely to fill it out – resulting in less effective government services to help them.

“I’ve received hundreds, thousands of letters of complaint” – Maxime Bernier, July 18

The privacy commissioner has received only 3 complaints on the census in 15 years, and many MPs have said they do not recall receiving any census complaints from constituents. Meanwhile, MP offices receive thousands of complaints every year about their taxes, yet we all still have to pay them. Filling out the census is a civic duty, and a small price to pay if we want to have a government



that can manage \$240 billion worth of taxes each year responsibly, using valid data.

“The questions necessary to achieve this goal (of providing a demographic picture of our country) are in the mandatory eight-question short-form version of the census” – Tony Clement Statement, July 13

Not so. The information only on the long census is used to evaluate literally dozens of programs and pieces of federal legislation – most of which help vulnerable Canadians: francophone minority communities, Aboriginals, visible minorities, the disabled, women fighting for pay equity, and unemployed workers. The Conservatives’ game is to leave Canadians in the dark and permanently hobble the government’s ability to enforce legislation and deliver social programs for our most vulnerable.

“I don’t accept the fact that every time you make a change on every matter of government business, you have to shout it from every rooftop.” – Minister Tony Clement, July 8

That’s why we have a Parliament – to get accountability for government decisions. That’s why Liberals are calling on the government to justify this decision at a House of Commons committee.

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