



Background on Questions for Political Candidates

Q: Will you and your party restore open and transparent communication between government scientists and the public?

- ❖ When the government of Canada adopted a new media strategy in 2007, Environment Canada was one of the first departments where the strategy was put in place. All media queries had to be referred to Ottawa, which then provided scientists with “approved lines.” The policy resulted in such lengthy delays that reporters on tight deadlines often gave up. Other requests for interviews were never granted. As a result, within one year [reporting on climate change](#) dropped by 80 per cent.
- ❖ In a [survey](#) conducted in 2013, 90 per cent of federal scientists felt that they were not allowed to speak freely to the media about their work. Faced with a departmental decision they believed could harm public health, safety or the environment, 86 per cent felt they would face censure or retaliation for speaking publicly about the decision.
- ❖ The muzzling of Canadian scientists has been widely condemned by the international community, with editorials in *The Economist*, *Nature* and other publications. Over [800 foreign scientists](#) wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, urging him to unmuzzle scientists. Author Chris Turner’s 2013 book, *The War on Science*, points out that the degree of prohibition and communications monitoring of federal scientists is unmatched in Canadian history.

Q: Will you and your party re-establish the mandatory long-form census?

- ❖ In 2010, the Conservatives replaced the mandatory long-form census with the voluntary National Household Survey. The information obtained from the long-form census had been used extensively by all levels of government, civil society, the business community and academics to make policies, establish new programs or businesses, and direct critical research. The mandatory questionnaire had a 94 per cent response rate. Instead, the voluntary National Household Survey has had only a 68.6 per cent full completion rate, and it has not produced the data that organizations need to do their work.
- ❖ The long-form census was abolished against the concerted advice of organizations from across the political spectrum. [Objections came](#) from Chambers of Commerce, professional organizations, health professionals, churches, academics, and former Chief Statisticians of Statistics Canada and Clerks of the Privy Council – hundreds of organizations in total.



- ❖ Five years later, the damage has been as serious as had been predicted by these organizations. Without reliable data, cities from coast to coast protest they are no longer able ensure taxpayer money is spent wisely on transportation, infrastructure and housing. Business organizations find they have difficulty locating new stores and banks, or even stocking shelves. Governments, without dependable data on employment, find it difficult to plan investment in education.
- ❖ The National Chambers of Commerce, the Canadian Association for Business Economics, child care advocates, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives have all argued that Canada needs to reinstate its mandatory long-form census.
- ❖ In 2011, the Liberals introduced the Act to Amend the Statistics Act. It would have increased the independence of Canada's Chief Statistician and reinstated the long-form census. In February 2015, this bill failed, although it was supported by the NDP and the Greens.

Q: Will you and your party appoint a Science Adviser who reports directly to Parliament?

- ❖ Many nations, including Germany, US, UK, Japan, South Africa and the Netherlands have developed strong methods of providing scientific advice on public policy, global science and technology relevant to national interests. By recommending how governments can better support and benefit from science conducted by their own scientists, they have become of increasing economic and social significance.
- ❖ In 2008, the Conservatives abolished the science advisor [position](#), ultimately replacing it with the [Science and Technology Innovation Council](#) which provides *confidential* advice on science, technology and innovation policy issues.
- ❖ In 2013, the NDP introduced a private member's bill that would have a legislated mandate to:
 - Assess the state of scientific evidence relevant to any proposal or bill before Parliament;
 - Answer requests from Committees and individual Members for unbiased scientific information;
 - Conduct independent analysis of federal science and technology policy;
 - Raise awareness of scientific issues across government and among Canadians;



- Encourage coordination between departments and agencies conducting scientific research.

Supported by both the Liberals and the Greens, the bill failed to pass.

Q: Will you and your party protect the ability of registered charities to participate in public debates without fearing government retaliation?

- ❖ In March 2012, at a time of massive cutbacks to the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) overall budget, the Agency received \$8 million for 2012-14 – later [increased](#) to \$13.4 million – which has been dedicated to investigating the activities and registered status of selected charities. The Canada Revenue Agency has [built a team](#) of 15 auditors specifically for this purpose. While efforts to crack down on Canada's charities continue apace, the CRA [appears to be scaling down](#) staff and resources aimed at tax evasion, including offshore tax evasion.
- ❖ Since the start of 2012, Ethical Oil, a not-for-profit organization with very strong links to the Conservative Party of Canada, has filed formal complaints against at least six charities. While some charities' audits began before these complaints were filed, [there is evidence](#) that complaints can have an impact on the direction and tone of ongoing audits. Environmental Defence (ED) is an example. In 2012, as part of a routine audit, ED was told that there were no major concerns. But in July 2012, Environmental Defence was hit with a [negative findings letter](#), not for its political activities, but for failing to have a charitable purpose.
- ❖ The effect of this “blitz” is an “advocacy chill” that has descended on charities that are critical of the federal government. It mutes their collective and individual voices, as well as the voices of those they represent, and diverts financial and human resources into anticipating, participating in, or complying with the auditing process and its results. Meanwhile, other charities that are in general agreement with the government's policy choices appear not to have been audited in a similar manner. Democracy is considerably damaged by this weakening of civil society.

Q: Will you and your party provide sufficient funding for research that ensures the health and safety of Canadians and the environment?

- ❖ Under the Conservative government, funding been cut from many organizations that carry out research on the topic of health, many focusing on minority groups, and on randomized clinical [trials](#). And major resources like Health Canada [libraries](#) have been closed.



- ❖ Organizations such as the National Aboriginal Health Organization and the [Canadian Women's Health Network](#) had their funding cut within the past few years. After their funding was cut, both eventually [ceased to operate](#). Both of these organizations carried out vital research on health pertaining to their respective groups, and often advised the government on health policy.
- ❖ The Ocean Contaminants Program of Environment Canada, which monitored the health of fish and maritime mammals, was closed down, as was the Smokestack team, which monitored the emissions of smokestacks.
- ❖ The government has even taken steps to explicitly weaken the Public Health Agency by [demoting](#) the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada and by closing Health Canada's primary research library.

Q: Will you and your party rebuild government libraries and archives and restore public access?

- ❖ Over the past 5 years, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the federal institution responsible for preserving Canada's history and cultural heritage, [has been seriously damaged](#). Badly conceived restructuring, a narrowing of its mandate, a refusal to collect important historical records, a significant reduction in staff, service, and access, and major budget cuts have undermined the strength of this important Canadian institution.
- ❖ Beyond LAC, dozens of Canada's federal libraries have been downsized and closed over the last few years. These specialist libraries housed some of Canada's most important collections. The [cuts to and closures of federal departmental libraries](#) has further put at risk the preservation of our documentary heritage and access to our cultural heritage.
- ❖ The changes at LAC and Canada's federal libraries have far-reaching implications for how Canada's history and cultural heritage are preserved and understood. To ensure that this collective memory is available for generations to come, the government must be committed to the preservation of Canada's full historical record.