

World Autism Awareness Day Act

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Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow up on a question I asked some time ago concerning the Canadian Council on Learning and, in the broader sense, information that the government does not have as we enter the new information age.

The Canadian Council on Learning was set up to assist in providing a road map for education for Canada. It had the support of just about every educational institute in the country and every province. It even had the respect of organizations around the world. For no apparent reason, the government not only refused to renew the Canadian Council on Learning but in fact took back some money that was left after the end of its run.

The reason we need the Canadian Council on Learning is simple. We do not have any surveillance on education in Canada. In fact, in one of the last reports that it put out, which was called "Taking Stock of Lifelong Learning in Canada 2005-2010:", it contains a chart that shows how different countries are doing in evaluating education within their own borders. The report compared Australia, the European Union, Germany, the U.S., Switzerland, the U.K., New Zealand and Canada in a number of categories.

For example, how many of these countries have had a major review in the last five years of post-secondary education processes? Australia, yes; the EU, yes; Germany, yes; the U.S., yes; Switzerland, yes; the U.K., yes; New Zealand, yes; Canada, no. Who has system-wide goals and objectives? All of them have those but Canada does not.

In how many countries is funding aligned with national priorities? Australia, yes; the EU, not applicable; Germany, yes; the U.S., yes; the U.K., yes, New Zealand, yes; Canada, no. Do we have quality assurance agencies in place? Australia, yes; in the EU it is under development; in Germany it is under development; the United States has it; Switzerland has it; the U.K. has it; New Zealand has it; Canada does not. We do not have quality assurance in place.

We need to know where we are going. As we have gone through this recession over the last few years, one thing has become very clear. The economy that we will be entering as we come out of the recession will be fundamentally different from the one when we went into the recession. Manufacturing has taken a big hit as have many other areas.

We need to find places for Canada to excel. Canada is a very well educated country. Traditionally, it has been. We have been slipping in the last five or six years as we have taken our foot off the accelerator of education and innovation. We need to know what we need to be doing to educate Canadians, from early learning and child care through pre-kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, literacy, adult learning, all those things. We need to know where we are. The Canadian Council of Learning, which was the only group that was actually putting together that road map, we do not have it.

As I said, there are people across the country, such as Don Drummond, a very smart man, smart enough to hire Howie Millard at the TD, said, "It is disturbing. Even the scant information we have is not adequately funded". He estimated that gathering useful information would cost \$15 million a year.

Arati Sharma, who was the national director of CASA, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, stated:

Without the research of groups such as the Canadian Council on Learning, Canada will continue to lack the knowledge needed to improve access, persistence and quality in our post-secondary institutions.

An editorial in the Toronto Star read:

—the learning council's work was of value to Canadians, particularly at a time when our economic future depends more than ever on our ability to compete with other knowledge-based economies around the world.

Canada has done very well. We have very strong educational institutions. I come from Nova Scotia. We have universities like Dalhousie, St. Francis Xavier, Acadia, Saint Mary's and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. We have a whole host of great institutions, such as the Nova Scotia Community College revitalized. We have great institutions but we are not putting that stuff together. We are not seeing what it all adds up to as a whole.

How do we compete in the world? How does Canada compete? How are we going to compete with those countries that traditionally did not spend as much but now are spending all kinds of money? The Canadian Council on Learning was telling us that. It was building the road map to a more prosperous Canada and it is gone, which is a shame.