



Letter to the Editor
Submitted August 1, 2010

In recent weeks the federal government made a number of announcements that threaten to quiet the voice of many who live on the margins: elimination of the mandatory long form census survey; possible dismantling of the affirmative action program; and elimination of the Participation, Activity and Limitations Survey representing Canadians with disabilities. They also made comments that minimize the valuable representation that special interest groups bring to regional, provincial and national discussions. As a charitable organization that advocates on behalf of people struggling with issues surrounding hunger and poverty, we have a vested interest in these announcements and offer the following thoughts.

To do our job well, FEED NOVA SCOTIA depends on the collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate, representative and comparable census data. The elimination of the mandatory long form will have a negative impact as we work to address social challenges, and we worry about the consequences for the individuals we serve. We are especially concerned because the information that is most important to poverty-related discussions is included in the mandatory long form: education, labour market, income, housing, ethnicity and religion. In addition to the impact this decision will have on our own work, we also question how government, businesses and other non-profit organizations will effectively develop legislation, services and programs in the absence of reliable information comparable to data collected during previous census years.

The financial impact of the proposed change is also worth noting. The new voluntary household form will come with a projected \$30-million expense—an expense that will pay to replace a long-standing process that has set the standard for which other countries strive to reach, with a new process that credible statisticians and a government-appointed census committee agree is severely flawed. FEED NOVA SCOTIA supports the recommendation made by this committee to proceed with an unchanged 2011 census and to explore an alternate mandatory process for 2016.

Our concerns with the proposed voluntary household form are amplified by the decision to further eliminate the Participation, Activity and Limitations survey, which provides critical data that helps inform development of legislation and programs to support people with disabilities. For a province with an aging population and one of the highest disability rates per capita, this is especially worrisome.

Lastly, we have concerns about a review and possible dismantling of affirmative action hiring practices at the federal level. Impulsive, poorly-researched amendments to the affirmative action program will have long term effects on Canadians, especially those struggling with hunger and poverty in our province. Nova Scotia's need for food banks will be further increased if affirmative action policies are dismantled and we continue to deny that barriers to employment exist.

These three announcements are indeed worrisome; as is the knowledge that the decision-making processes that led to the announcements were not informed through discussions with relevant stakeholder groups.

FEED NOVA SCOTIA encourages government to reflect on the decisions of the past weeks, and the feedback from across the country and their own advisors.

We will be forwarding our thoughts on these issues to federal political representatives. If you share our concerns we encourage you to contact your Member of Parliament and other local government representatives.

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