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**Views on Current Issues**

***Executive Summary***

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# Executive Summary

### i. Statement of Research Purpose and Objectives

Corporate Research Associates undertook the study ***View of on Current Issues*** on behalf of the Privy Council Office. The research aimed at gathering opinions and understanding perceptions of Canadian adults regarding current events relevant to the Government of Canada, including innovation, the environment, and culture.

This input was needed because complex issues are often difficult to communicate to the Canadian public in a manner that is easily and clearly understood. By carrying out this research, PCO is able to ensure a better understanding of the views and concerns of the public so as to develop effective communications strategies and products.

### ii. Summary of Key Findings

A wide range of topics were explored in this research project, including innovation, the environment and culture.

Beginning with **innovation,** overall, participants were supportive of the Government of Canada being involved in innovationin Canada, and understood this concept in a very positive light. The concept of innovation was seen as a Canadian value, and understood to be a new, progressive way of doing things that involves an element of creativity.

Participants believed that the Government of Canada plays a pivotal role in ensuring innovation happens in Canada, from playing a role in incubating and financing, to supporting, and promoting its development, as well as in sharing its successes. When asked to choose between helping to create the conditions for innovation to thrive in Canada or bringing in more innovation and experimentation into government, participants generally preferred the former. Participants’ awareness of what the federal government is currently doing on innovation was virtually nonexistent. That said, when asked, there was strong support for the government offering subsidies to support innovation, rather than providing tax cuts or investments, particularly for smaller organizations. In terms of sectors, participants favoured assistance for the healthcare sector, given Canada’s aging population, along with education, agriculture, forestry, and renewables and clean technology.

Throughout discussions, it was clear that participants were supportive of government involvement in innovation through skills training and support for higher education. These results speak to interest in seeing the government invest in ‘homegrown’ innovators, by providing the support required and creating the conditions for success. There was also a notable level of support for the government to encourage partnerships between innovative businesses and research institutions.

Regarding the environment, participants believed that climate change, the increased use of renewable energy, improved air and water quality, and enhanced recycling programs are among the most important environmental issues warranting government attention. While many environmental issues were at the forefront of people’s minds, knowledge and understanding of some of the terms used to speak of the environment were limited, including ‘carbon pricing’ which was better known to people as ‘carbon tax / taxe du carbone’.

In discussing the concept of carbon pricing, participants believed that the strongest argument in favour of implementing such an idea is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and using the proceeds of the tax to fund new investments for green technology. To some extent, carbon pricing was believed to encourage organizations to innovate and find permanent solutions to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. There was general agreement that a price on carbon will lead to a healthier environment, in that it makes it more expensive to pollute and less expensive to operate cleanly, thus encouraging companies to find innovative solutions to pollute less. It was also considered key to the clean energy economy of tomorrow and a way for Canada to do its part in the global fight against climate change. In general, there was support for strong action on climate change now for our children and future generations.

There were some concerns with putting a price on carbon. Specifically, the flight risks associated with overtaxing corporations was a top preoccupation. At the same time, participants expressed concern that a price on carbon could make Canada less appealing for foreign investment as well as making Canadian businesses less competitive on the global stage. There was also a perceived risk that any additional operating costs resulting from carbon pricing would be redirected to customers, thus reducing the population’s buying power.

Awareness of the cap and trade system was low although it was considered a good tool to measure Canada’s performance in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but not enough of a motivator to lead to innovative solutions. While the idea of having a maximum level of greenhouse gas emissions was appealing to Canadians, as it sets a performance objective that can be revised downwards, it was not seen as enough of an incentive to motivate organizations to find ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The lack of clear understanding of the carbon tax and the cap and trade system led to participants being unable to clearly articulate which they preferred.

When shown the current situation in Canada and the variances across provinces, it was clear that there was little to no awareness of the carbon pricing models used in Canada, and participants were under the impression that it was implemented in every province. Knowing this, there was a clear desire for all provinces to take part and bear some of the responsibilities to address climate change. While there was a perceived role for the Government of Canada in implementing a national carbon pricing strategy, its desired involvement was unclear. That being said, participants considered that the Government of Canada should establish carbon pricing guidelines and act as a watchdog, while provinces and territories would be responsible for the development and implementation of the carbon pricing strategy in their jurisdiction. This would ensure that actions are adapted to each province’s unique natural resources and economic landscape.

There was a strong desire that the funds collected from applying carbon pricing be reinvested to offset the negative impacts of pollution, specifically in the area of clean energy development, or in encouraging the production of environmentally-friendly consumer goods.

In some groups there was a brief discussion related to Asbestos, and findings reveal that Asbestos was considered as posing a health risk, and as such there was support for banning its use in Canada.

Turning to **culture and heritage,** participants believed that Canadian culture is broadly defined by its people, places of culture, and forms of cultural expression. Indeed, discussions revealed that Canadian culture is commonly defined by the various forms of artistic expression, such as music, performing arts, and films. It was also commonly associated with places of culture, including museums, libraries, and theatres, as well as public gatherings and festivals. History, heritage and genealogy were also top-of-mind when thinking of the culture sector in Canada. Our culture was also commonly defined as diverse and multicultural, likely reflective of the Canadian population. At the same time, there was recognition for the role that Aboriginal influences play in shaping culture in this country. Overall, ‘people’ were viewed as being at the core of what defines Canadian culture. Finally, French-speaking participants considered that bilingualism is a key differentiator of culture in Canada.

Awareness of Canadian content was widespread and its quality was seen as having improved in the past few years. Further, the term ‘Canadian content’ appeared familiar across locations, and it was primarily associated with Canadian-made artistic or cultural productions, which were commonly described as both diverse and of high quality. That said, there was no consensus as to whether Canadian content is popular or unpopular, or whether it is modern and exciting or boring and outdated. And while there was clear recognition of increasing quality over the last few years, it was still viewed as average at best, with music being deemed as having the best content and quality, followed by television. By contrast, participants were generally critical of the quality of Canadian theatre and film/movies.

While clearly appreciated by participants, there was a sense that Canada’s culture is threatened by a lack of proper funding and recognition from the public and institutions alike, and there was a desire for Canadian culture to receive increased funding. With declining public-sector support, there was a perception that the cost of accessing culture has increased, particularly for live performances. At the same time, how culture is consumed has changed with the introduction of the Internet, providing greater access to culture from here and abroad. It was believed that this changing landscape has introduced the pressure for Canadian cultural producers to enhance the product’s quality and ‘do more with less’ in order to compete with American productions. That said, participants felt stretched financially and believed that telecommunications companies should bear the brunt of any tax increase to fund Canadian culture.

There was a clear and recognized need for government support of Canadian content, especially given the impact of increased access to content. Although no specific details were provided, it was believed that the protection of Canadian content is good for the economy and contributes to creating or maintaining jobs in the sector. All in all, there was support for government intervening to support Canadian content to strengthen our Canadian identity, and ensure relevant quality productions are available for Canadian audiences. As a by-product, strong Canadian content was viewed as positioning Canada favourably on the global scene, thus having positive economic repercussion on other sectors of our economy, such as tourism. There was a desire for the support of smaller cultural initiatives, that truly reflect our Canadian values, rather than those which have already achieved global recognition or ‘big name’ artists.

In a few locations, discussions were held related to Canadian bank notes. Findings revealed that although there was support for a prominent Canadian woman to be featured on a bank note, it was unclear which one would be most suitable and on which note a woman should appear.

### iii. Description of Methodology

From June 21 to September 1, 2016, a total of 20 in-person focus groups were conducted in nine (9) markets, including Prince George, Surrey, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, North York, Toronto, Montreal, Sherbrooke, and Halifax. Between 8 and 10 participants attended each group, totalling 162 participants. Each discussion lasted two hours. A participation incentive ranging from $75 to $85 per person was offered based on market requirements.

### iv. Directional Nature of Qualitative Research

Qualitative techniques are used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than collecting quantitatively precise data or absolute measures. Due to the inherent biases in the technique, the data cannot be projected to any universe of individuals.

Qualitative discussions are intended as moderator-directed, informal, non-threatening discussions with participants whose characteristics, habits and attitudes are considered relevant to the topic of discussion.

### v. Research Costs.

The total contracted value of the research was $112,509.54 (including HST).