

Another Liberal MP breaks ranks on jobs attestation

The Liberal government shows no sign of budging from requiring the pro-abortion Canada Summer Jobs attestation, despite pleas from faith leaders and news of a second Liberal MP breaking ranks.

While Liberal MP Scott Simms was the only MP to vote for the Conservative motion March 19 that would have lifted the attestation requirement for organizations offering summer jobs that did not involve political activism, the seat of Liberal MP John McKay was conspicuously absent during the vote.

McKay had been in the House of Commons minutes prior, shaking hands with various MPs, and conversing in the aisle before the Speaker called the vote.

The *National Post* subsequently obtained a copy of a letter McKay had written to a constituent who had complained to the Scarborough–Guildwood, Ont. MP about the attestation.

“When the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was first conceived in the 1980s by its authors, it contained two critical components: 1) It was designed to protect the citizen from the state; 2) It provided a mechanism to balance competing rights claims,” McKay wrote.

“The converse of these two critical components is therefore that the Charter was not designed for the state to claim protection from the citizen and that it was not designed to promote one right over any other right,” said McKay, who is both a lawyer and an evangelical Christian.

“It is my view that the current government has inadvertently fallen into the trap of preferencing one right over another and of using the Charter to protect itself from perceived abuse by citizens.”

“The attestation clause is a regrettable example of that error,” he said. “It is my view that applications for government grants that engage in non-political non-activist work should be free of ideological bias and political preference.

McKay went on to say many have not been able to sign the attestation for reasons of conscience and that groups and charities in his own riding have been affected.

The MP, who was once part of a sizeable minority of pro-life and pro-family MPs in the Liberal caucus who voted their consciences on issues such as the redefinition of marriage, wrote his constituent he had made his views known

inside and outside caucus.

His objections, however, have fallen on deaf ears, as have those of faith leaders, Muslim, Jewish, Evangelical and Catholic who released a joint letter Mar. 28 following a March 21 meeting with Employment Minister Patty Hajdu.

They wrote despite their “persistent requests that the problematic attestation be amended or removed,” Minister Hajdu made it clear “no accommodation” will be provided,” nor will any changes be made this year to the attestation.

“Applicants that did not ‘check the box’ will be ineligible for a Canada Summer Jobs grant in.

“We were very disappointed that the government did not make any changes to the attestation for 2018,” said Neil McCarthy, a spokesman for Cardinal Thomas Collins of Toronto who attended the meeting on behalf of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB).

“Most would agree that there were problems with the wording and interpretation of the attestation,” McCarthy said. “Why wait until next year to fix a problem that has an immediate impact for hundreds of groups across the country?”

“Although she gave us her attention and was generous with her time, it remained clear that the Minister did not agree with our concerns,” said Julia Beazley, who attended the meeting on behalf of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

“She was clear that there would be no changes to the program for 2018 and that no accommodation would be made for those unable to sign the attestation without qualification. She did indicate that they would make changes to the wording for next year to bring greater clarity, but the intention to put in place limitations on who may receive the grant remains.”

Many organizations they represent “remain concerned that the question of ‘reproductive rights criteria’ and other undefined values will remain present in the application form in 2019,” said the letter signed by Margaret Ann Jacobs, president of the Catholic Women’s League; Dr. M. Iqbal Nadvi, chair of the Canadian Council of Imams; Bruce Clemenger, president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada; Rabbi Chaim Strauchler of the Rabbinical Council of America; Derek Ross, executive director and general counsel for the Christian Legal Fellowship; and Rev. John Pellowe, CEO of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities in addition to Cardinal Collins for the CCCB.

Clemenger said required attestation “sets a troubling precedent.”

“We are aware that the same language has appeared in the application guide for the Canada Service Corps, under ineligible activities,” he said in an e-mail.

“We believe it is important to confirm that this kind of values test is counter to the Charter’s protection of freedom of religion, conscience, thought,

expression and opinion, so that these freedoms are upheld in future government policies and laws. And so, we continue to consider challenging the attestation in the courts.”

Jacobs, who represented the more than 80,000 members of CWL, the largest women’s group in Canada, also said they had a “respectful dialogue” with the Minister, but left disappointed.

“Members of the League are very concerned that the current government is asking citizens to deny their beliefs in a manner which contravenes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” said Jacobs in an e-mail.

“It is most disappointing that there will be no accommodation for 2018 applicants and leaves hundreds of programs at risk of cancellation and/or the need to mount emergency fundraising campaigns.”

“For the CWL, this affects members who hire, workers who rely on jobs and youth who access the various programs,” she said. “Our members devote many volunteer hours in service to others, advocacy and in pursuit of social justice. It is these same members who will undoubtedly be called upon to fund-raise to support these most valuable summer programs.”