

Conservatives using tax system to censor Canadian film industry

By Maria Minna, M.P.

Social conservative Dr. Charles McVety has bragged publicly about persuading Stephen Harper's Conservative government to censor Canadian films through the tax system.

Dr. McVety – President of the Family Action Coalition and of Canada Christian College -- has been clear that he sees Bill C-10 as an opportunity to inject conservative values into deciding which films qualify for a tax credit – and which films don't.

If Bill C-10 is allowed to pass as is, it could open the way to using Canada's tax system as a *de facto* film censor.

Bill C-10 is an omnibus tax Bill which makes numerous, mostly technical, amendments to the Income Tax Act. At first glance, the section of Bill C-10 that deals with the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit appeared to present few serious challenges – that is, until the government and its right-wing allies tipped their hand.

After Dr. McVety bragged about influencing the Bill he made clear the government's intent.

As the Income Tax Act now stands,, the Heritage Minister or a government committee could deny tax credits to any film production deemed offensive and "contrary to public policy."

The Bill calls on the minister to define what is contrary to public policy – but leaves that definition entirely to the minister. The Conservatives had the choice to make the changes injecting socially conservative values into the decision-making process by regulation, which would have been open to public input. However, they chose instead to make the changes entirely behind closed doors.

Bill C-10 will also have a negative effect on the economics of the film industry. The guidelines will put doubt in the minds of investors worried whether they will ever get their money back.

This is very concerning for Beaches-East York given our strong contingent of film makers, actors, producers and other industry professionals who reside in the community.

In fact, many community members have already contacted me with their concerns about Bill C-10. Their message has been clear: Public funds should not be used to reflect one party's values, but reflect society as a whole.

Canadian film audiences are already protected by existing rules, such as those dealing with pornography and hate mongering, in the Canadian Criminal Code. There is no need to use a tax bill as a back door attempt to establish government censorship of the arts.