

Clement faces committee's ire in census hearing

Debate rages over rights of the individual and the government's need for information

By **MATTHEW LITTLE**
Epoch Times Staff

TORONTO—Industry Minister Tony Clement took some hard hits at a special committee hearing Tuesday on his controversial decision to make the long-form census voluntary, a move that has sparked passionate debate and accusations of fear mongering.

In a rare session, the Committee on Industry, Science and Technology met for an entire day, during summer break, to discuss the gov-

ernment's move to make the long-form census voluntary, removing the threat of imprisonment and fines as potential penalties for those who refuse to participate.

"We recognize that the information gathered in the long-form census is valuable. However, we also recognize that a balance must be drawn when the government is collecting data under the threat of fines, or jail, or both," Clement told the committee in his opening remarks.

Clement said the voluntary census would be sent to double the number of people that received it in 2006, suggesting any loss caused by it being voluntary would be made up for by the additional surveys.

He also went on the offensive, saying the opposition parties have promised to force Canadians to "answer personal and intrusive questions about their private lives, under threat of jail, fine or both."

NDP MP Charlie Angus said that statement misrepresented the po-

sition of opposition MPs who were concerned about how the minister made his decision.

"We expect an industry minister makes his decisions based on fact, not on urban myth," said Angus.

Angus said the government was manufacturing a crisis by talking about people being threatened with imprisonment for not filling out the form, something former head of Statistics Canada Ivan Fellegi later told the committee had never happened in the agency's history.

Clement avoided answering several questions during his testimony, including whether he had sought a privacy impact assessment from the Privacy Commissioner or if he knew how many people had been imprisoned for not filling out the census.

He was also criticized for not meeting with bankers, economists, and municipal planners and others to discuss the issue.

The committee also heard from two former Statistics Canada

heads, Munir Sheikh and his predecessor Fellegi.

Sheikh resigned on July 21 over media reports that said the agency recommended the government move to make the long form voluntary. He said any statistician would find such a statement to be poor advice and a blow to the credibility of a statistical agency.

"I came to the conclusion that I cannot be the head of an agency whose reputation has suffered," he told the committee.

Both he and Fellegi said that the move to a voluntary census would weaken the results because it would change who filled it out. Those with less education, income, and time were most likely to skip it, Fellegi said.

"These are exactly the people from whom you want information if the government is to develop policies to deal with their issues," he said.

Most witnesses who came before the committee thought the long form should remain mandatory,

at least for 2011 and until a proper study could be done comparing the impacts of moving to a voluntary survey. There were also those that defended the move to make the long form voluntary.

David Tanny, an associate professor at York University, was among those who said the government was correct in deciding the individual has the right to choose whether or not to participate in the census.

"The issue is not the economic or social usefulness of a survey. The issue is not how many people have complained. The issue is not good citizenry. The issue is not how private the information will be held. The issue is to what extent the state has the right to compel the individual to provide information. The issue is when an individual has the right, without any explanation, to just say no," he said.

Tanny went on to point out that moving the census online had already impacted the responses and other factors were also changing

the results of the census.

He compared the mandatory census to previous laws that empowered police to stop a person and demand identification under threat of arrest.

"This right clearly is beneficial to the state in performing the obligation of preventing crime and apprehending criminals, yet despite the benefits and likely cost savings, Canadian society has freely and firmly chosen to limit this right of the police," he said.

Don McLeish, president of the Statistical Society of Canada, was supportive of the long form remaining mandatory but concerned about the penalties. He said a fine of \$100 was more appropriate for non-compliance than jail time. He was also critical of some of the comments the government was making on the issue.

"I think the phrase 'under threat of imprisonment' is very misplaced in this discussion, since it's never occurred, and 'under threat of fine' makes perfect sense," he said.

Comics can aid literacy in young boys

By **JOAN DELANEY**
Epoch Times Staff

If you think comic books are sub-literate, low-quality reading for kids, think again.

Comic books and graphic novels may hold the key to promoting prose literacy in young boys—who have traditionally lagged behind girls in reading, according to the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL).

External findings summarized in CCL's latest "Lessons in Learning" article state that a common myth about comics is that reading them can replace the reading of other genres. However, research shows that boys who read comic books also tend to read more text-based material and report higher levels of overall reading enjoyment compared to boys who do not read comics.

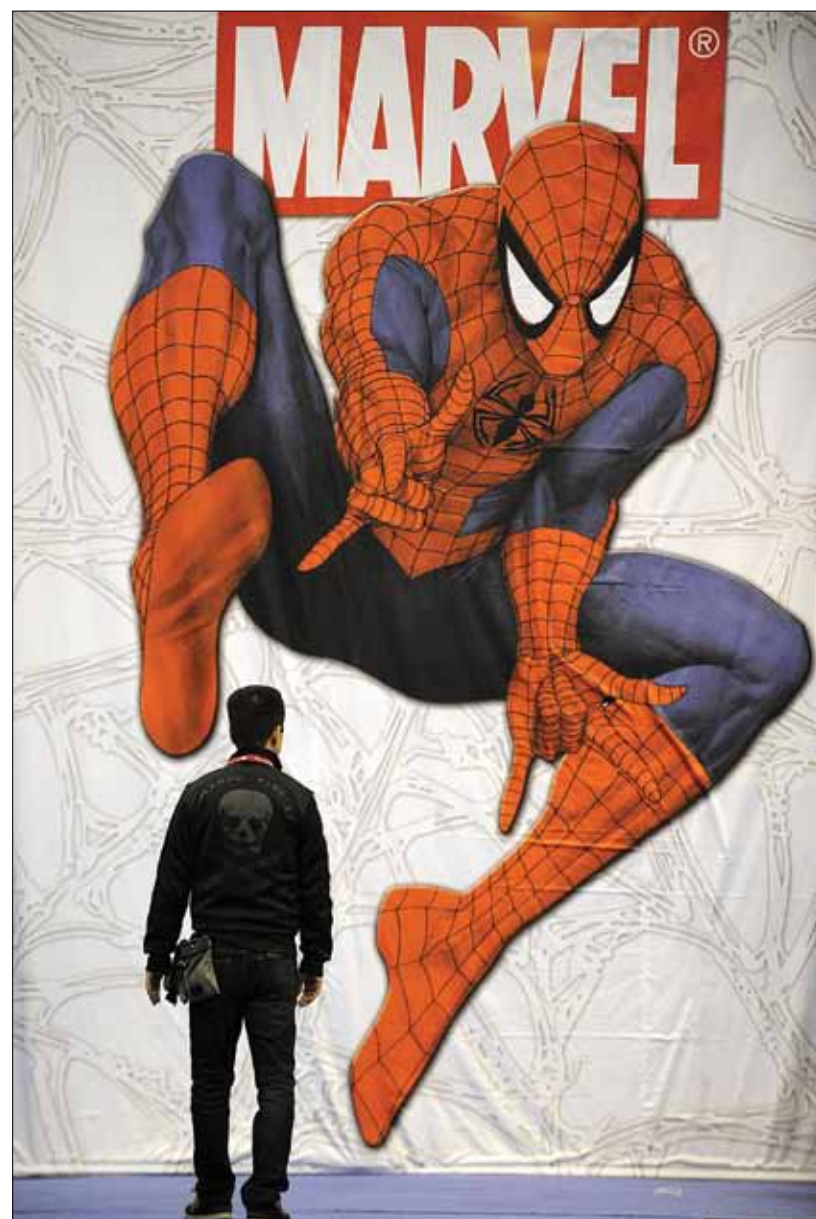
In fact, there is some evidence that comic books act as a "gateway" to other literary genres and can help young people make the transition from informal everyday language to formal written language, according to the research compiled by CCL.

Another myth is that the visual element of comic books makes them more suited to immature readers. But comics can actually help readers develop a number of useful language and literacy skills, including visual literacy—the ability to understand and respond to a visual image, research shows.

"For decades, tests have shown that young boys underperform in reading achievement and do not derive the same level of enjoyment from reading as girls," Dr. Paul Cappon, president and CEO of CCL, said in a statement.

"As this new article makes clear, comics and graphic novels hold untapped potential to address this disparity by promoting improved literacy among young males."

According to the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), comic books are the second most popular reading material for boys after newspapers or magazines. Additional research shows that 75 percent of elementary school-aged boys reported reading



A man looks at a giant Spiderman poster at New York's ComicCon 2009, a comic books fair. The Canadian Council on Learning says comic books and graphic novels can promote prose literacy in young boys who traditionally lag behind girls in reading. EMMANUEL DUNAND/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

comics compared to only 50 percent of elementary school-aged girls.

Despite this, surveys show that many educators still consider comics unsuitable reading material, judging them to be cheap, disposable, and of poor quality, says CCL.

After their debut more than 75

years ago, comic books were blamed for a range of social ills—from moral turpitude to juvenile delinquency—and have been subject to scorn and even censorship.

In recent years, however, comics have gained an unprecedented level of recognition, with some going on to

become Hollywood blockbusters and others garnering literary accolades, such as a Pulitzer Prize for Art Spiegelman's "Maus: A survivor's Tale," and a Guardian First Book Award for Chris Ware's "Jimmy Corrigan."

Comic books had their golden age in the 1930s and 1940s. But rules introduced by the Comics Code Authority in the United States in the 1950s led to the cancelling of many titles, including most of EC Comics' popular ghoulish line that included "Vault of Horror" and "Tales From the Crypt." These are considered classics today.

"Heroes, Freaks and Superrabbits—the Jewish Colour of Comics," a comics exhibition currently running in Berlin, displays 45 of the most successful comic artists, overwhelmingly children of European Jewish families who had emigrated to New York.

Some of the most iconic superheroes, such as Batman, Superman, and Spiderman, were the work of Jewish artists. After the comic strip appeared in the immigrant neighbourhoods of New York, Jewish artists played a key role in developing the medium.

CCL says research into the reading habits of young boys suggests that they may be less interested in reading because their literary interests—which include science fiction, fantasy, adventure stories, "how-to" manuals, and comics—are under-represented in their schools and classrooms.

Even before children are ready to read text, comic books can give them practice in understanding material printed on a page, tracking left to right and top to bottom, and inferring what happens between individual panels in a story, says CCL.

Reading comics can help develop many of the same literacy skills as reading prose-based books, such as the ability to follow a sequence of events, the ability to connect narratives to the reader's own experiences, the ability to predict what will happen next, and the ability to interpret symbols.

Thanks to their strong visual element, comics have also shown promise as a teaching aid for second-language learners and students with learning difficulties.

"It is clear that comics have become an undeniable and potentially powerful part of our society and culture," said Cappon. "Considering the evidence it is time that educators and parents put aside any misgivings that they may have and embrace comics as a positive teaching and learning tool."

New test kit aims to deter date rape

By **HELENA ZHU**
Epoch Times Staff

A matchbook-sized test kit indicating whether an alcoholic drink has been spiked with a date rape drug will be on the market in Canada by the end of August.

Already sold as testers in Quebec, the Drink Detective will be available in drugstores and bars for women who want to find out if someone added a drug to their drink in bars and clubs.

Distributed by Alcotest, the product tests for three of the most common date rape drugs: gamma hydroxybutyric acid (GHB), ketamine, and the benzodiazepine group, which consists of Rohypnol, Valium, and Xanax.

The kit comes with a dropper which can be used to apply drops of a suspect beverage onto test pads which would change colour in response to the presence of drugs. A drink containing GHB would turn the test pad blue and one with ketamine would turn it orange-red.

"The goal is to offer people an option when in doubt whether their drink is safe or not. And if the test is positive, then we think it can help intercept criminals who put drugs in people's beverages," Stephan Lepage of Alcotest Quebec told Postmedia News.

The disposable kit has been available on a limited basis in Quebec to test the market. Nearly 3,000 kits, which consist of a dropper and test pad, have been sold in bars, restaurants, and pharmacies for \$5.99, the suggested retail price. The product is good for one use only.

The device was invented by former McGill University mathematics professor Stanley Grossman, who now lives in Britain where the product was first launched in 2004 and is used by several police services to identify date rape drugs, according to media reports.

'The goal is to scare the cowards who spike drinks.'

—Stanley Grossman

Grossman's invention was inspired by a 2003 study indicating that one in four young British women who frequent pubs and clubs were raped while drugged. He said the device can make it more difficult for potential date rapists to operate.

"The goal is to scare the cowards who spike drinks," he told the Toronto Sun.

Grossman explained that rather than testing every drink, the more effective aspect of the kit is that its availability in nightclubs and bars could act as a deterrent to would-be offenders. He suggests bars retailing the Drink Detective put up posters to emphasize the presence of the kits.

"I think it's a good idea to make it available in bars and clubs to send a clear message to abusers that they don't belong there," Renaud Poulin, president of a Quebec bar owners association, told Postmedia News.

"If it can prevent only one assault, that's going to be worth it." However, some advocates for the rights of abused women have panned the product. Concilia Muonde of the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa said the test could lure women into being less vigilant.

"The test is very simplistic and gives the false hope that I'm walking into a bar with this in my purse and that I'll know if my drink has been spiked. However alcohol itself is the most commonly used drug to take advantage of women," she said.

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