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Comprehensive study of young people's attitudes to politics delivers sobering message for politicians and educators

Ottawa – As the federal parties jockey around the Throne Speech, one of the most comprehensive studies of young people's attitudes to politics delivers a sobering message for both politicians and educators.

Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement was issued today by Canadian Policy Research Networks. It analyzes and expands upon six individual studies commissioned by CPRN since it held a groundbreaking "National Youth Dialogue and Summit" in 2005.

The central finding is that 'Generation Y' – those born after 1979 – is far from apathetical and apolitical. However, while very much tuned into small "p" political life, young Canadians are increasingly disenchanted with our formal political institutions and politics as currently practiced.

"The challenge for all Canadians, and especially for the political parties, is to find a way to better reach out and involve young people in the formal political process before their disengagement threatens the very underpinnings of our democratic system of government," said Sharon Manson Singer, CPRN President.

"Young people think and talk about their civic and political engagement much differently from the rest of us. Unfortunately, much of this is missed by traditional research methods and academic discourse about what constitutes political participation. As a result, their engagement has been misunderstood and misrepresented. It seems to get lost in translation between the old and the new – between their perspectives and a traditional perspective of what engagement is and is not."

"Today's young people are the best-educated generation ever," noted Mary Pat MacKinnon, CPRN's Director of Civic Engagement. "Yet, they have less formal political knowledge than did their parents and grandparents. While highly suspicious of political spin and insincerity, many fail to grasp how government and political institutions work. Nor do they get the connections between their everyday realities, politics and policy."

CPRN is urging a series of proactive steps to turn this around and engage young people in the civic and political life of their country:

- All political parties must engage in a thorough re-evaluation and retooling of their policies and structures to make them relevant to, and inclusive of, young people.
- The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) take the lead in developing a pan-Canadian civic literacy strategy.
- CMEC convene a national forum of youth, educators, academics and politicians to kick-start the strategy-development process.
- Consolidate and co-ordinate disparate federal programs and policies concerning young people within a stand alone federal Ministry or Secretariat responsible for youth.
- Involve both teachers and youth in revamping and expanding civics instruction at both the elementary and secondary school levels.
- Engage and support existing organizations that are either youth-based or that serve young people.

- Challenge youth themselves to play their part in becoming more discriminating consumers of news and public affairs.

“Canada needs the talents and passion of all of its generations,” Manson Singer stated. “Investing in youth is a pre-requisite to maintaining a strong democracy, and we can ill afford to delay implementing the recommendations that *Lost in Translation* puts forward.”

To download a copy of ***Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement***, please go to www.cprn.org.

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