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Museum raises admission age for sex exhibit; Heritage minister: Criticism not intended to quash 'independence' of national facilities

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By The Canadian Press

OTTAWA - Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore is all in favour of sex education for kids - just not at national museums, without prior parental consent.

The minister defended his criticism of a controversial sex exhibit at the Canada Science and Technology Museum in the capital, which prompted the museum to censor a portion of the show and raise the age limit for unaccompanied children.

He denied opposition accusations that he's interfering with the independence of museums to impose a prudish 1950s attitude toward sex education.

"I believe in the independence of our museums and I also believe in sex education," Moore told the House of Commons on Thursday.

"The director of the museum asked me to view the exhibit. ... I was asked for my opinion and, in my opinion, it is not appropriate for young children to be exposed to sexually explicit material without the consent of their parents."

Moore, who holds the purse strings for national museums, added: "I made my view known and it is up to the museum to decide now where it goes."

The condemnation from Moore's office was considerably stronger on Wednesday. Moore spokesman James Maunder called the exhibit - Sex: A Tell-All Exhibition - "insulting to taxpayers" and outside the mandate of the science and technology museum.

A short time later, the museum pulled an animated video informing children about masturbation and raised the age of unaccompanied admission to the exhibit to 16 from 12. Museum official Yves St-Onge told the Huffington Post that management took steps to appease critics after receiving more complaints than expected.

On Thursday, New Democrat MPs ridiculed Moore's puritanical attitude, noting that the exhibit has run in Montreal and Regina without a peep of protest.

"My God, they're such prudes," said Rosane Dore Lefebvre. "Sex education is not the work of the devil."

"It's not the 1950s. It is important we talk about sex with our kids," echoed Andrew Cash.

Outside the Commons, both NDP Leader Tom Mulcair and interim Liberal Leader Bob Rae said Moore's interference raises a dangerous precedent that undermines the independence of museums.

"I'm very surprised to see a minister of the Crown deciding what should or shouldn't be shown in a museum," said Mulcair. "It's really a serious cause for concern right now in Canada."

Rae said "museums are independent, they can make their own decisions, and the government isn't in a position to be the censor on exhibitions that are there."

However, the Institute for Marriage and Family Canada, which visited the show last week, believes the "erotic and titillating" exhibit doesn't belong in a museum.

Dave Quist, the institute's director, said the exhibit approves and promotes anal sex, multiple partners and sex without emotional and marital commitment.

The flap over the exhibit comes amid controversy over recent federal job postings for cultural institutions that fall under Moore's portfolio. The postings have included a requirement that the successful applicant be able to maintain an "effective relationship" with the heritage minister and his staff.

"You know, last week the minister was demanding that the chairman of the board of the CBC be his friend, that's the bar of entry. This week he's meddling in the affairs of museums," said Cash.

"It's concerning to us that you've got a heritage minister who's trying to micro-manage national museums in our country. That's not his job."