

Youth Ministry : International Year of Confusion

OTTAWA (CUP) — The federal government has no immediate plans to launch an advertising campaign for International Year of Youth, even though three months of the year have nearly passed.

Youth ministry officials say the delay in advertising stems from a lack of funds and disorganization in the youth portfolio, which has been held by three different ministers since its inception in December 1983.

Brad Mann, assistant director of communications in the secretary of state's office, says youth minister Andree Champagne has only asked for advice on how to launch the year and has yet to approve a budget for advertising.

"There's no decision on advertising because the minister has not yet taken it. We have had such a rapid turnover of ministers and must present a new budget and briefing to each one," Mann says.

"We've had so many changes. It's only normal that the minister would want to become acquainted with her portfolio before making any decisions and would want to make those in an orderly fashion."

Champagne took charge of the youth ministry shortly after the Tories swept into power. She succeeded Liberal MP Jean LaPierre, who held the post since July 1984. The first youth minister was former Liberal MP Celine Hervieux-Payette, appointed in early January 1984 and replaced by Lapierre in the Turner cabinet.

In a speech to the Ottawa board of education in December, Champagne promised to spread information about the year's themes and objectives to the public. And in a speech to the House of Commons in January, she further promised to develop a communication program to heighten Canadians' awareness of young people's contribution to society.

So far, the youth ministry has produced two bulletins outlining the year's activities, posters and buttons. It has less than \$3 million for promotional material out of \$22 million budget.

Gilles Leveillee, youth ministry chief of staff, says Champagne may allocate more money for promotion at the month's end and that ministry officials are examining the effectiveness of advertisements in student newspapers and on the radio, two forms of media that reach thousands of young people.

"I'm just trying to see the best way to spend our money. I'm for advertising but we have to find the best way to reach youth with the money we have," Leveillee says.

Leveillee says the youth minister has not yet conducted an information blitz

through the media because she changed the criteria for grant eligibility in late November, two months before she actually launched the year in her House speech. The criteria changes include accepting applications from organizations, instead of just individuals, and including

partial salaries as part of budgets for grants.

Opposition MPs say they are not surprised that Champagne has failed to advertise the year, which they say has been a sad joke played on young people since its beginning.

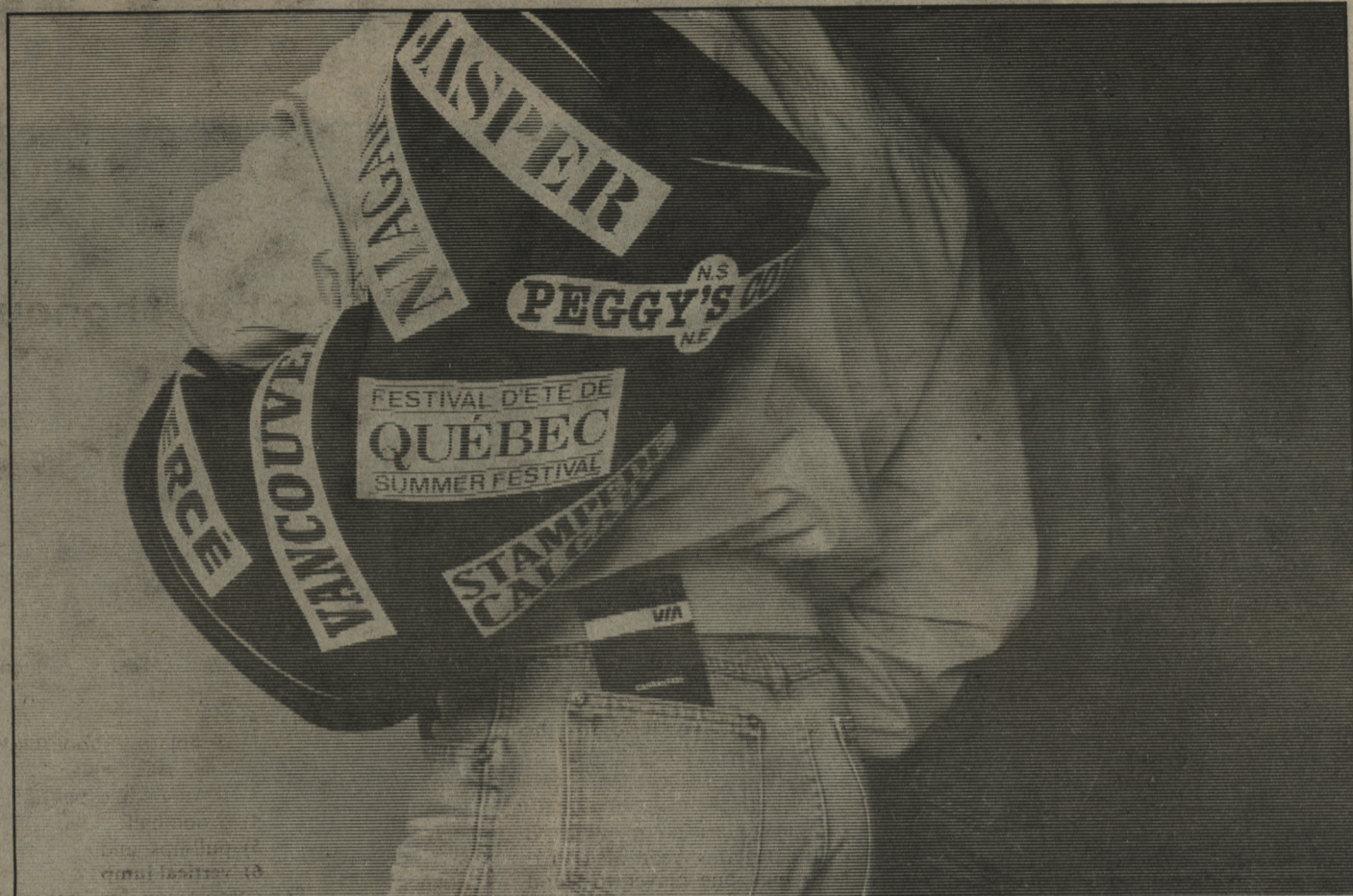
"No advertising budget is fairly consistent in regard to the government's initiative for youth. Not much is going on anyway," says Howard McCurdy, NDP education and youth critic.

"I don't know if Champagne has made very many

decisions. I don't see that she's doing anything at all."

Liberal youth critic Sheila Finestone says the year is the "biggest secret in town" and has turned out to be one "big birthday party" for the minister, her staff and young people not bothered by social problems.

"She's the minister of one fat big party and should change the title of her ministry to the ministry of untroubled youth," she says. "Either youth has a voice that has an impact in the highest levels of government, or the ministry should be cut out and the farce be stopped."



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