



Andrew Scheer, Leader of the Official Opposition, Regina — Qu'Appelle
Leona Alleslev, Deputy Leader, Aurora — Oak Ridges — Richmond Hill
Alain Rayes, Quebec Political Lieutenant, Richmond — Arthabaska
Tom Kmiec, Conservative National Caucus Chair, Calgary Shepard
Michael Barrett, Ethics, Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes
Hon. Michael Chong, Democratic Institutions, Wellington — Halton Hills
Marilyn Gladu, Health, Sarnia — Lambton
Luc Berthold, Infrastructure and Communities, Mégantic — L'Érable

January 10, 2020

Dear Andrew Scheer and members of the Conservative Shadow cabinet,

Transparency, integrity and accountability are essential for democracy to function. When these values are violated, democracy is undermined.

I am writing to you because of my concern that, with regard to the issue of asbestos, the Conservative Party in the past did not respect these values and is continuing to disrespect these values today, thereby putting democracy and the public interest in jeopardy.

The Quebec government has [mandated](#) the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE) to hold a public Commission of Inquiry into the presence and management of asbestos and to evaluate projects to commercialize the 800 million tons of asbestos mining wastes in Quebec and to provide a report on the state of scientific knowledge on the impact of asbestos and asbestos residues, particularly on health. This is an important exercise in democracy. The Conservative Party, however, is creating an ugly political and social climate to jeopardize these important hearings. No other political party is doing so.

Position of the Conservative Party when it formed the government from 2006 to 2015

During the nine years that it was in power, the Conservative Party rejected the [scientific evidence](#) that all forms of asbestos cause deadly diseases and that all use of asbestos should stop. It promoted the mining, use and export of chrysotile asbestos, claiming it can be safely used. Chrysotile asbestos represents the totality of the global asbestos trade today and in the

past century represented 95% of all asbestos sold. The Conservative government gave millions of dollars of public funds to and was a director of the asbestos lobby organisation in Quebec (the Chrysotile Institute, earlier called the Asbestos Institute).

Supported and financed by the Conservative government, the Chrysotile Institute sent out media releases stating that scientific evidence supports the use of chrysotile asbestos and that those who oppose its use, such as the World Health Organization, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the International Commission on Occupational Health, the Union for International Control of Cancer, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the Quebec Cancer Society, the Quebec Public Health Association are [idiots](#). At the United Nations in 2006, 2008 and 2011 the Conservative government refused to allow chrysotile asbestos to be listed as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention, as the Convention's expert scientific committee recommended and even though chrysotile asbestos was listed as a hazardous substance in Canada.

In 2011, the Conservative government criticized the Quebec government for cancelling a \$58 million loan to enable a company, Fibre Mineral Inc., to open the Jeffrey underground asbestos mine in Asbestos, Quebec, which would have made Canada the biggest exporter of asbestos in the world. In 2012 the Conservative government [said that there was no point in Canada continuing to oppose the listing of chrysotile asbestos](#) as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention since the Quebec government had closed down the asbestos mines . The Conservative government continued at the UN in 2013 and 2015, however, to refuse requests from the scientific community and from [its own Health Canada experts](#) to support the listing of chrysotile asbestos.

Concerns about the position of the Conservative Party today on asbestos

Today, commenting on the Quebec Commission of Inquiry on asbestos, Conservative MP Luc Berthold, representing the Quebec constituency of Mégantic-L'Erable and Shadow Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Communities, has made [statements](#) to media rejecting the concerns of Quebec's Directors of Public Health regarding asbestos, saying they have no evidence to back up their concerns. Mr. Berthold [disputes](#) the overwhelming scientific evidence that chrysotile asbestos poses a threat to health and asserts that the real problem is that there is a very powerful anti-asbestos lobby which has lots of money to pay for studies to say that asbestos cannot be safely used. Mr. Berthold provides no evidence to substantiate his allegation that studies showing harm caused by chrysotile asbestos are biased, funded by a powerful, financial lobby and should be disregarded.

Mr. Berthold makes slurs against those who oppose asbestos use, seeking to defame and delegitimize their participation in the Quebec government's Commission of Inquiry. [Mr. Berthold alleges](#) that "Opponents of asbestos have for years taken advantage of every forum to denigrate the region, to denigrate asbestos, and to say that it is impossible for asbestos to be used in a safe way." (translation) Mr. Berthold thus creates an ugly atmosphere of

suspicion, resentment and anger, claiming that those who support the WHO position that chrysotile asbestos cannot be safely used, are enemies of the region.

In my opinion, Mr. Berthold's attack on those who oppose asbestos and his effort to defame them constitute serious wrong-doing and an attack on democracy. Mr. Berthold has political and social power, particularly in the region where the Commission of Inquiry is carrying out its work; he is using his power in an irresponsible and destructive manner.

To my knowledge, there has only been one other government forum in Quebec or Canada in the past decade at which opponents of asbestos participated. In 2010, Quebec health experts and I made a submission to a Quebec government hearing on mining legislation. In our [submission](#) we documented the scientific consensus on harm caused by all forms of asbestos and called for an end to Quebec's mining and export of asbestos. We stated: "It is imperative and urgent that the Quebec government assist the remaining employees of the asbestos industry and put in place an action program to deal justly with the communities that are still dependent on the asbestos industry and enable them to achieve a diversification of their economy, an initiative that has moreover already been commenced." (translation)

I believe that this submission was appropriate and respectful. I believe that Mr. Berthold's vilification of those who oppose asbestos use is improper.

Mr. Berthold repeatedly states that a rich, powerful anti-asbestos lobby is the problem here in Canada. He provides no evidence of this evil force. I receive no funding from no-one and use my Old Age pension and savings for my work. The scientific experts and organisations I work with are not being funded by secret, corrupt forces. The evidence shows that the asbestos lobby in Canada was funded with \$ millions. A person I worked with for four years was, in fact, paid over \$ 1 million for his work. He was [secretly paid by the asbestos industry](#) to spy on me and others who opposed asbestos use. His many invoices and his fraudulent work were exposed in a court case,

Serious questions

Respect for independent scientific evidence, whether regarding fossil fuels or asbestos, is one of the most critical issues of our time. Political parties have a duty to act with transparency, integrity and accountability. It is, I believe, irresponsible conduct and a threat to democracy when political parties reject independent, scientific evidence and allege that those supporting independent, scientific evidence are enemies of the community.

There is not a single, reputable scientific organisation in the world that supports the use of chrysotile asbestos.

Mr. Berthold is the only member of the Conservative Party who is stating the position of the Party on asbestos. Could you please tell me whether the Conservative Party of Canada supports the position and statements of Mr. Berthold. Does the Conservative Party agree with Mr. Berthold's defamation of those who oppose asbestos?

Does the Conservative Party support or continue to reject the overwhelming scientific evidence that chrysotile asbestos cannot be safely used and should be banned? Does the Conservative Party now recognize that chrysotile asbestos is a hazardous substance and should be listed as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention?

I wanted to send this letter to the Shadow Cabinet member responsible for Science, but unfortunately I could not find any person with this responsibility.

I look forward to receiving a clear and transparent response to these serious questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Ruff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Kathleen Ruff

Founder & Director, RightOnCanada.ca

Recipient of the Medal of the Quebec National Assembly to thank her for her perseverance in the struggle to stop the mining of asbestos in Quebec and Canada and to ban its use and for her essential contribution to the health of workers and the population of Quebec.