

mystar -1° Toronto My Horoscope Good News My Team My Writers This Day in History



THE WORLD OF MARKETING TECHNOLOGIES

- NEWS YOUR TORONTO OPINION Editorials Readers' Letters Public Editor Corrections Editorial Cartoon SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE DIVERSIONS CLASSIFIEDS OBITUARIES

Opinion

Last best hope for democracy in Canada: An appointed Senate

Stephen Harper has for several years now claimed that his proposed reforms for the Canadian Senate are about bringing accountability and democracy to the much-maligned second chamber.

Text size: + - Reset

+ save to mystar



MICHAEL DE ADDER / ARTIZANS.COM

By: Senator Elaine McCoy Published on Mon Feb 22 2010

Stephen Harper has for several years now claimed that his proposed reforms for the Canadian Senate are about bringing accountability and democracy to the much-maligned second chamber.

With his most recent prorogation of Parliament, however, it is clear that for all his rhetoric, his reforms are less about a thoughtful reinvigoration of our political institutions and more about maintaining political power.

National and international political pundits alike have called him out for proroguing Parliament this time round. Happily, many more Canadians are now debating what might be done to fix our political system. But first, I believe we need to make sure we focus on the right questions.

In my opinion, the critical question is this: Why does the prime minister have so much power?

The answer is quite simple: Because the House of Commons no longer holds the prime minister to account.

Next question: What should be done?

Answer: Insist that MPs take orders from their constituents, not their party leaders. MPs with backbone, not backbenchers, would deliver a properly functioning Commons. Of course, the likelihood of this happening is somewhat remote. So what can we do while we're waiting?

Lots of people think we should just go ahead and elect senators to make the system work better. Indeed, a new Canadian Press poll proudly trumpeted: "A majority of Canadians would like to (see) senators elected by the voters from the province they represent."

Well, I guess even I might have answered that way if I'd only been given the three

We are tyco Integrated Security Steve Young football legend ACCESS CONTROL • INTRUSION • VIDEO • MONITORING www.TycoIS.ca / 1.800.2.TYCO.IS

Top News

- Updated Conflicting reports on whether body was found in charred cabin Why a Canadian would make a bad pope (according to Colbert) Polar bears may need to be fed by humans Nuclear test hardens Pyongyang's position Police officer's killer worried God wouldn't love him, court hears Toronto students worry about family, school and future, survey finds Helicopter exec with ties to ORNGE charged in India bribery scheme Sandals believes teachers keen to resume extracurricular activities

Inside thestar.com



Religious charities see surge of CIDA aid, study says



Toronto Maple Leafs continue to impress with gutsy win over Philly: Cox



Oscars 2013: Five most original shopping scenes

EXPLORE THIS STORY

1 PHOTOS

+ save to mystar

Recommend 0

Tweet 0

Pin it

+1 0

World of MBAs Your ultimate resource about the pre-eminent business degree. Learn More

Editorial Board

- Meet the Star's editorial board The Atkinson Principles

The Star's Public Editor

The Star's Public Editor welcomes reader comments and complaints about news and feature content in the print and online editions.

- About the Public Editor Recent Corrections Report an Error

Star Business Club: Burlington florist fights multinationals online

A RRIF explained: It comes after an RRSP

California Travel: Beautiful February bargains help you escape winter

choices offered by the pollster: (1) abolish the Senate; (2) have the prime minister appoint them; or (3) elect them myself.

Looking at each of the three choices, I'm always surprised that more people don't want to just get rid of the Senate.

But then I'm reminded that we wouldn't have a Canada at all if the Fathers of Confederation hadn't agreed to an appointed upper chamber. That was the deal-maker – none of the other provinces wanted to let Ontario run away with the country, which it could have done if it abused its power of the majority.

Perhaps Canadians today intuitively recognize that the Senate provides a valuable counterweight against the abuse of power and therefore want to keep it.

But to have the prime minister appoint senators? Ah, there's the rub.

We're already upset that the prime minister has too much power. The thought of giving him or her any more rankles at all levels, especially so when we remember transparently political payoffs evident in various prime ministerial appointments over the past few years.

Like a mischievous genie wanting desperately to get out of a musty old bottle, the pollster only gives you one more choice: an elected Senate. Unlike a journeyman genie, however, he doesn't give you the standard warning: "Be careful of the wish you make."

Consider what happens now when you elect someone to go to Ottawa.

No sooner have they spent their first term in office than they're emailing home to explain why they voted for something their constituents didn't want.

The reason, of course, is party discipline. They're "whipped," i.e., told to vote with their party or else leave caucus. Most stay and do what they're told. Without the party, it's very difficult to get re-elected.

It would be no different for senators if they were running for election. Most would run as party candidates. What we'd end up with is nothing more than 105 more backbenchers. Right back, in fact, where we started.

So let's start again. Let's take the proposition that an independent, appointed Senate is, after all, Canada's last best chance for democracy.

We'd still be left with the problem of how we appoint senators, of course. But surely we can figure out how to do that without prime ministerial intervention.

It is, when you get right down to it, a prerogative exercised by the Governor General. That she takes advice is a good thing. For years now, however, we've accepted that she only take advice from the prime minister. What if, instead, she convened a blue ribbon advisory panel to help choose senators?

The panel could identify outstanding Canadians with a proven record of dedication to what's best for the country, men and women who could stand tall and say to our elected members, "Are you sure that's what you want to do?"

As Senator John Abbott declared, speaking in 1890, that's our job. "Let us take care," he said, "that no temporary fit of prejudice or passion, injurious to our country or disadvantageous to our interests is allowed to force a measure through this Parliament without giving to the people a further opportunity for considering it ..."

Being appointed, individual senators can stand up and do what Abbott called on us to do without worrying about whether we have a job at the end of the day. At least that gives our nation one last bulwark against overbearing executive power.

What it gives us, in short, is a constitutionally protected place where Canadians from all parts of the country and all across the political spectrum can make their voices heard.

Elaine McCoy is an independent Progressive Conservative senator from Alberta.

Apps of the week: Feb. 8	How should you handle your child's first crush?
--------------------------	---

Twitter Now

Videos

Your System Status

WE'RE SORRY!

You need to update your Flash Player.



IMPORTANT: After installing the required upgrade please reload this browser window to view the video player.

Most Popular

Interview with alleged Osama bin Laden shooter gives intimate account of famous raid

Father of boys killed in crash charged with murdering suspected drunk driver

Helicopter executives with ties to ORNGE arrested in India bribery scheme

Maple Leafs beat Flyers, lose James Reimer to injury

Have Maple Leafs finally learned to develop young talent? Cox

Toronto Maple Leafs continue to impress with gutsy win over Philly: Cox

North Korea nuclear test hardens Pyongyang's position

With Toronto Maple Leafs goalie James Reimer hurt, who is available on the market?

Fugitive ex-cop Christopher Dorner in gun battle, two officers wounded

Stranded cruise ship leaves passengers adrift: 'There's water and feces all over the floor'

Walk Where Jesus Walked

www.goisrael.com/bestdeals

Walking along the Sea of Galilee You 'll never be the same!

Safest Way to 44% Returns

www.dailygainsletter.com/bankacct

Elite accounts pay you 5% per year on top of returns exceeding 44%.

Critical Warning Number 6

www.ProfitConfidential.com

This Will Hit Americans Harder Than Anything Since the Great Depression

Top Income Stocks in 2013

WealthyRetirement.com/income

Six reliable dividend payers to give your portfolio a boost.

AdChoices



Chicago for \$240
Tour Chicago on a budget in 24 hours.



Grow your Business
How to tap into the new Canadian Immigrant?



Steaks under \$15
How to get the most beef for your buck



Date Spots for Wine Lovers
Places to tip back a glass with your favourite wine-swilling companion



California Travel
A perfect bike tour of Santa Monica and Venice



The Sunshine Panini
The Dish examines a popular entrée.

thestar.com

- News
- Your Toronto
- Opinion
- Sports
- Business
- Entertainment
- Life
- Diversions
- Classifieds
- Insurance Hotline

- New in Homes
- Contests
- Blogs
- Lottery Results
- Obituaries
- Corrections
- Contact Webmaster
- FAQ
- Behavioural Targeting

Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.

- About
- Atkinson Principles
- Statement of Principles
- Subscribe
- My Subscription
- Contact Us
- News Releases
- Star Internships
- Careers @the Star

Advertise with us

- Advertising Terms
- Mediakit
- Online Advertising
- Print Advertising
- Sponsored Sections

Initiatives

- Santa Claus Fund
- Fresh Air Fund
- Speakers Bureau
- Classroom Connection
- Community Giving
- Pages of the Past

Connect with Us

- RSS feeds
- Twitter Updates
- News Alerts
- Newsletters
- Mobile Devices