

FULL COMMENT

TRENDING [Ukraine](#) | [Quebec Election](#) | [Rob Ford](#) | [Justin Trudeau](#) | [Tim Hortons](#) | [Lotto Max](#)

Andrew Coyne: The Tories were right to be nervous. Marc Mayrand shredded their 'Fair Elections Act' almost line by line

ANDREW COYNE | March 7, 2014 9:29 PMET
More from Andrew Coyne | @acoyme



Chief electoral officer Marc Mayrand almost wasn't allowed to speak. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Adrian Wyld

Like Share 1.2k | [Twitter](#) | [Google+](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Email](#) | [Comments](#) | [More](#)

No wonder the Tories were so nervous. The government had been noticeably skittish about what Marc Mayrand would say before the Commons Procedure and House Affairs committee Thursday: not only had it kept the chief electoral officer largely out of the loop in the months before it introduced its landmark Fair Elections Act, but there was doubt whether he would even be allowed to testify about it afterwards. A promise to that effect had been made to the NDP's David Christopherson the night before to



10 Florida Communities **DIVOSTA**

View Communities

Brand New Home
From \$162,900

NP columnists read their favourite feedback

You need to have the Adobe Flash Player to view this content. Please click here to continue.

POST PICKS

[Liberals offer alternative to 'victim' Quebec](#)



Philippe Couillard attacked Pauline Marois for perpetuating a vision of Quebecers as weak and under siege

[Conservatives propose public sex offender registry](#)



Justice Minister Peter MacKay is pushing for a publicly accessible sex offender registry, despite their failure in the U.S.

[Last call for closing time](#)

persuade him to end his filibuster of the Act in committee. Yet on the day Mr. Mayrand's testimony was interrupted by the calling of not one but two votes in the Commons just as he was scheduled to speak.

At any rate, at length he was allowed to give his testimony, at the end of which very little of the Act was left standing. The chief electoral officer, in his quiet, workmanlike way, simply shredded it, almost line for line, proposing more than two dozen amendments that would effectively rewrite the bill.

The provision banning "vouching" came in for particularly heavy fire: while the government insists the practice, by which voters who lack proper identification can have another voter vouch for them, has given rise to widespread voter fraud, Mr. Mayrand observed there was no evidence for this. It did not help the government's position that the authority it cited in response, Harry Neufeld, author of a report on electoral irregularities in the 2011 election, later backed up Mr. Mayrand's stance. ("I never said there was voter fraud," he told Canadian Press.)

The treatment of Mr. Mayrand, like the misrepresentation of Mr. Neufeld's report, is unfortunately of a piece with this government's approach generally, in which secrecy, deception, and brute force are very much the watch words. But what is objectionable in ordinary legislation is intolerable in a bill such as this, one that touches upon the very heart of the democratic process. Of all bills, you would think, this is the one that should invite the most transparency, the most public input, the most reaching out to opposition parties, so as to leave no room for doubt that the fairness of elections had been preserved. Yet from the start, the very opposite course has been pursued.

Related

[Harper vote overhaul would destroy campaign spending limits, chief electoral officer tells House of Commons](#)

[Fair Elections Act sure to deprive Canadians of voting rights, U.S. experts warn](#)

Entrusting the matter to Pierre Poilievre, among the most ruthlessly partisan ministers in a government filled with ruthless partisans, was an early warning sign. Sure enough, not content with blindsiding the chief electoral officer, the minister — for Democratic Reform! — gave media and opposition members the merest sniff of the mammoth bill before thrusting it upon Parliament, where, after the usual curtailing of debate, it was packed off to committee, whose hearings will be likewise restricted (hence Mr. Christopherson's filibuster). This is not how a government interested in fairness conducts itself.

But then, the speed and secrecy are understandable, in a way, since the closer one reads the bill, the worse it looks. It is not that the bill is all bad: some provisions, such as the limits on bequests to political parties or the stiffer penalties for election fraud, are quite welcome. But good or bad, what is true of every part of the bill is that it furthers the interests of the parties in general, and of the Conservative party in particular.

The bill would raise the limits on both contributions and spending. All parties would benefit from this — needlessly: there's never been so much money in our politics — but the Conservatives, as the most successful fundraisers, would plainly benefit most. It would exempt from those limits expenses incurred to raise funds from previous donors: again, without justification, but again to the benefit of the party with the longest donor list — or the greatest willingness to abuse it, the distinction between a fundraising call and an advertisement being self-evidently hard to enforce.



If liquor stores can sell booze in the morning, so should bars and clubs

Tim Hudak's \$700-million football



Maybe Chrysler didn't really need government "assistance" to advance its spending plans, but why not ask for it anyway?

Tolerance on campus



Sorry, Trinity Western critics: It turns out that gay students can thrive even in religiously affiliated schools

Mulcair spins his own flip-flop



When the NDP leader said he would categorically, absolutely, irrefutably never form a coalition, what he really meant was ...

Keystone XL — A pipeline for suckers



Much has changed in the world since Keystone was first proposed. Canada needs to consider whether it might actually be better off without it

Letters to the Editor

Do you have an opinion to share with other readers? Then [send us a letter](#).

FP Comment

[Peter Foster: Vladimir Putin's green allies](#)

[Terence Corcoran: Finally, a way to kill the sacred subsidized cow](#)

[Lawrence Solomon: Why Ukraine should break up](#)

Next big U.S. bankruptcy?

www.endofamerica.com

You'll never guess who's likely to go bankrupt next in America.

Alzheimer's Trial

clinlife.com/Alzheimer's_research

New research study for Alzheimer's Find out more here.

Today's Top News Videos

You need to have the Adobe Flash Player to view this content.
Please click here to continue.

You need to have the
Adobe Flash Player to

Web2PDF

[converted by Web2PDFConvert.com](http://converted.by/Web2PDFConvert.com)



view this content.
Please click here to continue.

Recent Tweets

Barbara Kay: 'Rape culture' fanatics don't know what a culture is natpo.st/1dCtKuA 6 hours ago

Jen Gerson: The amazing Dr. Homer performs budget tricks to dazzle and astound natpo.st/1dCjUsl 8 hours ago

Nicolas Van Praet: Take a pill, Canada, Quebec isn't in the mood for a referendum natpo.st/1ikmvqT 8 hours ago

South Africa's legal system also on trial during Pistorius proceedings natpo.st/1ik0Yid 11 hours ago

Rex Murphy: Rob Ford is the unlikely new champion of vapid, do-nothing pop celebrity natpo.st/1dBcpCb 17 hours ago

It would allow incumbent parties, rather than Elections Canada, to choose important officers at polling stations: yet again, without offering any justification, and with the same potential for abuse. It would allow the parties to collect and assemble the so-called "bingo cards," lists of who voted and who did not in each riding — information currently given out only to individual candidates — without any of the usual privacy safeguards, the parties not being subject to federal privacy legislation.

Elections Canada would be hamstrung in all sorts of ways. It would be forbidden from communicating with the public in anything but the most rudimentary terms — not even to encourage people to vote. It cannot be entirely coincidental that, as with the ban on vouching, the people most likely to be affected — the young, the poor, the marginalized — are the ones least likely to vote Conservative.

Likewise, the office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections, charged with enforcing the elections laws, has not only been denied the power to compel evidence, as it had requested — federal parties do not even have to provide receipts for expenses — but has been hived off to a different section of the bureaucracy altogether, though it will be under much the same gag order: it is not even clear whether it will be allowed to communicate with Elections Canada. I leave it to the reader to judge who benefits from that.





The thing is just riddled with this sort of stuff. Perhaps each measure would not seem so troubling on its own; nor even would the whole if the government did not seem so intent on smuggling it into law. But as it is I think some alarm bells should really be going off.

Postmedia News

 Find National Post on Facebook

 Like  Share  1.2k  Twitter  Google+  LinkedIn  Email  Comments  More

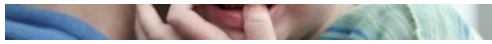
Most Popular

			
Andrew Coyne: The Tories were right to be nervous. Marc...	Christie Blatchford: Ezra Levant insists he's not a 'reporter.'...	Conrad Black: Breaking Quebec's logjam	Barbara Kay: 'I culture' fanatic know what a cu

Topics: **Full Comment**, Canadian Politics, Harry Neufeld, Marc Mayrand

AROUND THE WEB





Schiff: Public Ignoring This Horrific Obamacare Detail Money Morning



9 Huge Celebrities Who Are Surprisingly Sn Celeb Zen

ALSO ON NATIONAL POST

Oil wells and the city: Rift widens between anti-oil activists, ...
224 comments

Russia reinforcing ...
115 comments


Have the PQ poked the bear?: Liberal leader Philippe Couillard ...
777 comments


Trapping to save
150 comments


2224 Comments National Post

Sort by Best ▾

 Join the discussion...

 **ABH** • 21 hours ago
These guys are doing it to themselves. Over and over again. And they're not even br
213 • Reply • Share >


 **Allan Beveridge** → **ABH** • 20 hours ago
They probably hope that with this bill they will win again and it won't matter aft
to act in the same treasonous manner they have been doing since they took c
148 • Reply • Share >


 **Politically_Correct** → **Allan Beveridge** • 6 hours ago
"Give me ten year's time - and you would not recognize Germany anyn

"You won't recognize Canada when I get through with it." Stephen Harp


"It is not TRUTH that matters, but VICTORY." Adolf Hitler

The last quote is the most telling. Time has moved on but the same F/
dictator is Canada's Hitler.
51 • Reply • Share >

 **BlueMondo** → **Politically_Correct** • an hour ago
Your prescient quotes of Adolph Hitler are fully verified. I have j
point out that the time line in the first quote was actually 4 year
point as it coincides rather interestingly with the roughly 4 year e
5 • Reply • Share >


 **1i** → **Politically_Correct** • 5 hours ago
"You won't recognize Canada when I get through with it." Steph

You might try to find a source for that statement. The best I've
quote Mr Harper, but not giving a source/date/time. 5 May 201
find the alleged 2006 statement/speech/interview whatever. Not
worldview, or that it is out of the realm of possibility that the CPC
still ...
9 • Reply • Share >


 **Politically_Correct** → **1i** • 5 hours ago
Well, I did see it sometime ago on one of the "Stephen Harper (

there:
20
• Reply • Share >


 **neilpk70** → Politically_Correct ago • 3 hours
CBC had an article on the Harper Quotes Dossier, but it got pulk
9
• Reply • Share >

 **Proud Surrey** → Politically_Correct ago • 2 hours
Translation: You have nothing. Liberals almost never do. They j
match their hearts) and then, when pressed for proof, say som

Witches got better trials than this.
3
• Reply • Share >

 **Scott Maphilisto** → Proud Surrey ago • 33 minutes
what do you think of VICs appointment or the recent wage incre
elections act may need a UN vote team to monitor our elections
elections?or the 12 percent increase on RCMP salaries then a tu
3
• Reply • Share >


 **SpinachInquisition** → Proud Surrey ago • an hour
So do you have any misgivings about the Fair Elections Act, PS?
2
• Reply • Share >

 **Stupid_Monkey** → Politically_Correct ago • 10 minutes
<http://s3.documentcloud.org/do...>
• Reply • Share >


 **Stupid_Monkey** → Stupid_Monkey ago • 8 minutes
Links to the rest here:

<http://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/po...>
• Reply • Share >

 **amazinggrace** → Politically_Correct ago • an hour
Big Brother has arrived.
• Reply • Share >

 **junction citizen** → 1i ago • 3 hours
I'd suggest reading Lawrence Martin's book, Harperland. Mr. Ma
9
• Reply • Share >

 **ChristineLalonde** → junction citizen ago • 3 hours
Lawrence Martin is even more of a Liberal Hack than Coyne or I
6
• Reply • Share >

 **junction citizen** → ChristineLalonde ago • 3 hours
One problem with the right is that because they are so biased a
and cheat and make things up, too.

Most people do actual research and base what they say on fact
Sorry.

Reply · Share >



Proud Surrey → junction citizen ago · 2 hours

Freudian projection, JC. The faults you "see" in others are really liberal immaturity.

Reply · Share >



SpinachInquisition → Proud Surrey ago · an hour

I find dismissing the opinions of everyone who is part of a politic

1 · Reply · Share >



canucktwofour → Proud Surrey ago · 8 minutes

better than conbot b s..

Reply · Share >



SpinachInquisition → ChristineLalonde ago · 40 minutes

Coyne is a liberal hack? Someone should tell him!

1 · Reply · Share >



Proud Surrey → junction citizen ago · 2 hours

And I'd suggest looking for corroborating evidence before presen

Reply · Share >



walley2 → junction citizen ago · an hour

lawrence Martin is a die hard liberal and his book makes good kir

Reply · Share >



Proud Surrey → Politically_Correct ago · 2 hours

So you would rather be an honest loser, PC? Yeah, that sounds false dilemma, no point in taking you seriously anyway.

Reply · Share >



SpinachInquisition → Proud Surrey ago · an hour

We'll settle for honest, thanks.

Reply · Share >



walley2 → Politically_Correct ago · an hour

.liberal campaign slogan, there will be soldiers in the streets in ca

Reply · Share >



amazinggrace → walley2 ago · 39 minutes

Maybe there will be yet.....Canadians are heading toward a revc Heave Steve 2015

2 · Reply · Share >



Con Oil Luddite → Allan Beveridge ago · 20 minutes

Every time I pull in for gas I curse all Tories. The rest of the time I am what these sleazy Tories depend on. Me and thousands of others know for dirty crap, because this Harper guy keeps getting elected (not by m that says elected MPs must reply to registered mail? Im getting very a Im pretty sure there are a lot more waiting for GreenNH3 who might dk

↑
↓
• Reply • Share >



JohnDoughe → ABH ago • 19 hours

At the same time they are doing something very rude to us. The things is we Canadians are too sheep-like to have a Canadian Spring.

73
• Reply • Share >



nononespecial → JohnDoughe ago • 6 hours

It is that kind of attitude that acts as a ball and chain to the likes of Ad then later.

10
• Reply • Share >



Q_Impact → ABH ago • 11 hours

Little Peter Pumpkineater,
had a task from Dear Leader
Write a bill that stacks the deck,
And tell Canadians to go to Heck

68
• Reply • Share >



He Kafei → Q_Impact ago • 5 hours

Little Peter Pumpkin Eater
Had a task from his Dear Leader
To write a bill that makes their luck
And to tell Canadians "Get tae —"

3
• Reply • Share >



Andy7190 → ABH ago • 17 hours

I think Harper is leaving. He can't hope to win the way he's been going the last

61
• Reply • Share >



nononespecial → Andy7190 ago • 6 hours

Show boating Kenney is being done just in case. He will be the anointed (be the first time they changed the date of an election. I would be the f ?)

11
• Reply • Share >



Andy7190 → nononespecial ago • 5 hours

I bet Harper would favor Kenney over Prentice. I bet he is setti

8
• Reply • Share >



subgenius → Andy7190 ago • 4 hours

Sadly, the way Kenney treats the provinces, i don't think he'd be bring on Prentice CPC!

5
• Reply • Share >



nrfnrd → Andy7190 ago • 3 hours

Prentice should be the PC leader.

2
• Reply • Share >





Andy7190 → nrfnrd ago • 3 hours

CPC leader. No more PC. Prentice did run for PC leader, and he l

4
• Reply • Share >


 **Francien Verhoeven** → Andy7190 ago • 2 hours
I bet Trudeau thought Martha Hall Findlay was a stronger contender to debate Martha. We understand.
1 • Reply • Share >

 **Pickngrin** → Francien Verhoeven ago • 2 hours
Good God you're obtuse Francien! Here the Conservatives are not without public consultation - invoking closure to limit debate - and support their views and you prattle on and on about Justin! You won't even acknowledge that the Conservatives are falling *woef*! What happened to you?
6 • Reply • Share >


 **ThatBCGuy** → Pickngrin ago • 28 minutes
She is one of those people who determine support for an issue! These are the ones responsible for this type of legislation.
^ • Reply • Share >
| v

 **amazinggrace** → Pickngrin ago • 34 minutes
Francien is totally obsessed with Justin. Can't stop posting about Must be the hair.
^ • Reply • Share >
| v


 **Andy7190** → Francien Verhoeven ago • 2 hours
Clearly she was not a stronger contender. JT got over 80%.
^ • Reply • Share >
| v


 **Francien Verhoeven** → Andy7190 ago • 16 hours
You hope Harper is leaving.
8 • Reply • Share >
| v

 **Andy7190** → Francien Verhoeven ago • 8 hours
I think Harper is leaving. I hope the snow melts today.
49 • Reply • Share >
| v

 **Francien Verhoeven** → Andy7190 ago • 4 hours
You are engaged in wishful thinking. That amounts to the same

But hey, keep thinking Harper will not run in the next election, if
3 • Reply • Share >
| v

 **Adam Smith** → Francien Verhoeven ago • 3 hours
It seems strange to want him to run for the party. Like wanting Toronto when it seems there have to be better alternatives. Sir Harper has already done so and he may personally cost the Conservatives
5 • Reply • Share >
| v

 **Andy7190** → Francien Verhoeven ago • 4 hours
He can run if he wants. But It won't turn out well.

The snow is melting today, turns out!
8

Reply



Proud Surrey → Andy7190 ago • 2 hours

"Our"? For whom else do you presume to speak?

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Andy7190 → Proud Surrey ago • 2 hours

Should have been "out". Typo.

1 • Reply • Share >



Erikxyz → Francien Verhoeven ago • 5 hours

Harper is finished.

17 • Reply • Share >

Load more comments

 [Subscribe](#)

 [Add Disqus to your site](#)

Our Partners

[Infomart](#)
[The Province](#)
[Vancouver Sun](#)
[Edmonton Journal](#)
[Calgary Herald](#)

[Regina Leader-Post](#)
[Saskatoon StarPhoenix](#)
[Windsor Star](#)
[Ottawa Citizen](#)
[The Gazette](#)

Classifieds

[Remembering](#)
[Celebrating](#)
[Classifieds Marketplace](#)
[Workopolis](#)
[FlyerCity](#)
[Classifieds Self-Service](#)

Services

[Advertise with us](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Subscriber Services](#)
[ePaper](#)
[Newsletters](#)
[Site map](#)

Legal

[Privacy](#)
[Terms](#)
[Contact us](#)
[Copyright & permissions](#)

Connect with Us

[!\[\]\(c50c8b7b2cc2cf9ff925edec0ee94c0d_img.jpg\) Twitter](#)
[!\[\]\(8bed43dc33ecdde61e2f76c8f5517125_img.jpg\) Facebook](#)
[!\[\]\(047f882704cdc566325d0a83645d692e_img.jpg\) LinkedIn](#)
[!\[\]\(4f39bb1f5d124de68e2d5e309adc07d7_img.jpg\) Pinterest](#)



| © 2014 National Post, a division of Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

POST POINTS

Earn rewards for being a loyal National Post Reader

[Sign In](#)

[Learn More](#)

[Join](#)