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Fair Elections Act: Slow it down, Mr. Poilievre (3)

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"Appointing election officers on any basis other than merit is inconsistent with the principle of administrative neutrality, and contrary to predominant Canadian values." That was the finding of the Neufeld Report, a 2013 Elections Canada-commissioned review of electoral rules and practices. So why is the Conservative government's Fair Elections Act introducing more partisanship, to the benefit of the governing party, into an electoral system that is supposed to be impartial and non-partisan? Good question.

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Bill C-23 contains many troublesome and even dangerous elements – too many to cover in just one editorial. There's so much wrong with this legislation that we're doing a week-long series.

On Monday, we criticized a part of the bill that will stop some eligible voters from voting, by making it much more difficult for them to register at the polls. On Tuesday, we called on the government to scrap a provision in the legislation that creates a giant campaign-spending loophole that will benefit the Conservative Party. Today, a look at a measure that opens the door to more partisanship and favouritism in the oversight of elections.

The bill proposes that the winning party in each riding be given the power to nominate that riding's central poll supervisors. This is madness. As Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand's lengthy criticism of Bill C-23 points out, "Central poll supervisors are the ones in charge of a polling place." Under current law, they are chosen by the non-partisan officials of Elections Canada. That's as it should be. Any change opens the door to mischief.

We're with Mr. Mayrand on this: "Election officers should be appointed based on merit and not

be nominated by candidates, electoral district associations or parties.” That’s the best way to run a fair election. Why is the government moving in the other direction?

The bill would also provide the political parties with a post-election list of eligible voters who had cast ballots. In principle, this is not all bad. In practice, it raises serious concerns about voters’ privacy rights.

Political parties have always been able to monitor voter participation, which is an important part of our active Election Day process. Parties have a role to play in monitoring polls, and improving voter turnout. But voters have rights, and their participation in elections must formally remain a private matter, between you and an apolitical Elections Canada. Do you want campaign workers to be able to easily look up which elections you voted in, and which you did not? Neither do we.

Parties should remain informed and privileged observers, not administrators, of elections. Tomorrow, we’ll take a look at more of what’s wrong with the Fair Elections Act – in particular, how it limits the powers of the Elections Canada to promote voting and to investigate irregularities.