

(Français suite)

FOR RELEASE APRIL 23, 2014

## **OVER 460 ACADEMICS CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO WITHDRAW FAIR ELECTIONS ACT**

An open letter from over 460 Canadian academics calling for the withdrawal of the Fair Elections Act (Bill C-23) was sent to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Members of the House of Commons and Senators today. The letter stresses that amendments proposed by a Senate committee are insufficient to salvage "an irremediably flawed Bill."

Melissa Williams, one of the authors of the letter, was overwhelmed by the response from her colleagues across the country. "It is truly rare for so many academics to unite around a matter of public policy, and with such urgency. Indeed, I think it's unprecedented in Canada. It reflects experts' judgment that this legislation strikes at the very heart of our democratic institutions."

The letter urges the government to draft truly fair election reforms based on meaningful consultations with opposition parties, non-partisan experts, Elections Canada, and the public. It was published on April 23 in the *Globe and Mail*.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/headline/article18114166/>

The letter included many of the signatories of an earlier letter, which appeared in the *National Post* and *Le Devoir*.

<http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2014/03/11/dont-undermine-elections-canada/>

<http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/canada/402209/loisurlintegritedeselections-lettre-ouverte-au-premier-ministre-stephen-harper-et-au-parlement-du-canada>

The professors are concerned that amendments recently proposed by the Senate would not address glaring defects in the Bill.

These defects include:

- failure to provide the Commissioner of Elections power to compel witness testimony in investigating systematic electoral fraud
- partisan appointment of election poll supervisors
- the gag on Elections Canada's efforts to encourage voter turnout
- the elimination of vouching as a safeguard of the constitutional right to vote and voter information cards as proof of address.

The professors also argue that the Bill's voter ID restrictions could invite costly legal battles for violating the constitutionally protected right to vote.

They are also dismayed by the government's public attacks upon the Chief Electoral Officer and Ms. Sheila Fraser.

"We implore all responsible public office-holders to heed reason, evidence, and experience... [W]ithdraw the Bill and begin anew," the letter concludes.

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