

LETTERS: TO THE EDITOR

How about academic input on defence

Can academics help the federal government? Decisions, by any party, always under scrutiny and subject to severe criticism, might be missing a valuable source. Possibly they do receive advice from eminent academics, but do they actually seek it? Do they follow it?

I wonder if Canada would have made the same decisions about Iraq and Afghanistan if we had known then what we know now? Might we have known more, had we engaged a wider academic community in the decisions? And, looking ahead, just how will our government make the next big decisions about Sudan, the Arctic, or new terrorist threats?

Lt. Col. David M. Last, head of the Royal Military College's politics and economics, is arranging to have five prominent RMC McNaughton-Vanier scholars debate these very issues next month in Ottawa. His moderated round table will

include Major-General Andrew Leslie, chief of transformation, Canadian Forces; Tom Ring, Assistant deputy minister, Public Works and Government Services; Wendy Gilmour, adviser to Public Safety Minister Vic Toews; Peter Schmidt, political scientist and adviser to the German government; and Franklyn Griffiths, professor emeritus, political science, and 'George Ignatieff, chair emeritus' for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Toronto, specializing in Arctic and international security.

That's impressive, but I wonder if the powers that be, meaning the people molding our future, will pay attention to the advice of these experts, and govern Canada accordingly; which leads back to my original question: can academics help federal government decisions on security and defence issues?

Rosaleen Leslie Dickson
National Press Club director
Ottawa, Ont.

Keep prostitution illegal, says reader

Regarding Ontario Court of Appeal Judge Marc Rosenberg's decision to extend a stay on Justice Susan Himel's September decision to decriminalize prostitution.

No one has a "right" to immoral behaviour. Legalizing prostitution will only increase legal as well as illegal prostitution. Nations that have already liberalized prostitution laws have seen a stark increase in trafficking and victimization of women.

They have also experienced a higher level of organized crime and drug use linked with the trade. Prostitution not only destroys the physical, psychological, and spiritual integrity of the human beings involved, it also destroys countless marriages and families. Let us hope the Conservative government will be successful in their appeal to keep prostitution illegal.

Paul Kokoski
Hamilton, Ont.

Don't pass Bill C-36, feds shouldn't interfere

I am deeply concerned about Bill C-36 currently before the Senate. As a person who has been diagnosed with a disease that doctors have no answers for, I have taken it upon myself to seek out complimentary and alternative forms of health care. I have had great success with natural health products which have kept me healthy. I am now faced with the prospect of this changing with the very real possibility of Canada passing Bill C-36. I can't even begin to imagine why a government would want to keep people from taking responsibility for their health.

People are embracing this lifestyle and to suddenly tell them they need the government to protect them from natural health products is not only insult-

ing, but it is a joke. If anything, we need more protection from pharmaceutical companies.

I will tell you from experience that life can change in a second. One minute you think you are healthy and the next your world falls apart when told that this is not the case. May you never have a child, sibling, or parent who is faced with an illness and who could benefit from natural health products because telling them you are responsible for a decision that has condemned them to illness is not a talk I would wish on anyone. Please stand up for the Canadian people's rights and freedoms with regard to natural health products and say no to Bill C-36.

Ernest and T.G. Allen
Edmonton, Alta.

Bill C-36 undermines democracy

If you believe the Conservative rhetoric about Bill C-36 enhancing consumer product safety, please reconsider.

I have reviewed Bill C-36 in detail and have analysed it in the context of the concerns expressed by Shawn Buckley and the NHPPA. I am not a constitutional expert but there is much to indicate that his concerns have considerable merit. Bill C-36 does appear to threaten the foundations of why I have been proud and felt safe as a Canadian for almost 60 years.

History is littered with the societies who slid from freedom into autocracies and oligarchies

simply because its citizens believed that 'this could never happen here.' If you don't sound an alarm, no one will.

I am sure Health Canada has the very best of intentions with Bill C-36, and I am not for a second inferring that Health Canada is deliberately trying to undermine democracy. But Bill C-36 does just that. And as such it starts us down a very icy path. The road to perdition is paved with good intentions.

Rick Cheeseman
Port Howe, N.S.

Bill C-36 strips Canadians' rights, says reader

I would like to publicly thank those Senators who oppose bill C-36 and were willing to take the time to respond to those of us who have written to them. Now I ask the rest of you to reconsider what you are doing in supporting this bill. Specifically, this is to the Conservative Senators who are supporting this bill 100 per cent across the board. Caucus politics should not come in to play with a bill that in essence strips Canadians of their fundamental rights. Please have to courage to stand down from this action.

It is an outrage that this bill keeps showing up, in a different form, every year. To keep dressing it up does not change its meaning; it is against the will, and best interests, of the people of Canada. Our government does things for special interest groups on a regular basis. In

this case, it is a large section of the quiet population that is being affected, and we will not be quiet any longer. Please let Shawn Buckley tell our story again.

Please let the people whom you represent be heard. For once and for all, please cast down this bill, and ones like them, which ultimately destroys free choice for the people of our great country to keep ourselves healthy. Because we keep ourselves healthy, at our own expense, we are not a burden on the health care system like much of the rest of the population. I am very rarely ill, and have only seen a doctor twice in the last 20 years, both time for minor things that have been taken care of, thank you very much.

Steve Cummings
Toronto, Ont.

INSIDE POLITICS: PARLIAMENT

The 24/7 news offers less rather than more in extensive Parliamentary reporting today

The demands of feeding a round-the-clock information beast usually favour bite-size news to the detriment of meaty debates that need more time-consuming media ministrations to be properly digested.



BY CHANTAL HÉBERT

The only Parliamentary debate on the latest extension of Canada's military presence in Afghanistan was held during regular office hours on a November Thursday, a time in the week and in the Parliamentary season when the Hill is a hive of media activity.

None of the party leaders spoke. But, for the first time since the government announced it would devote hundreds of soldiers to the training of the Afghan army, diverging visions of Canada's post-2011 role were extensively laid out by proponents of the deployment and the development options.

Arguing from different corners, the Liberals' Bob Rae and the NDP's Dick Harris each gave a comprehensive rendition of the reasons why their respective parties sit on opposite sides of the fence on this issue.

With the notable exception of the news junkies who spend their days riveted to CPAC's live parliamentary feed, most Canadians are unlikely to have been aware that a House debate took place, let alone to have been apprised of its highlights.

It might as well have been held in a remote cave in the dead of the night.

In the days leading up to the presentation by the Bloc Québécois of an Afghan-related motion, the politics of the government decision were dissected in various media quarters, including this one.

The subsequent vote on motion was also covered—mostly from the angle that it was a test of Liberal unity.

But the substance of the policy argument, as debated by the elected politicians who have a say in the decision to commit Canadian men and women to a war theatre, was ultimately not deemed to be all that newsworthy.

It is hardly the first time that this Parliament drops off the media radar as it airs out a high-profile policy.

Last spring, an NDP bill designed to ensure that future Supreme Court nominees are bilingual enough to hear arguments in either official language went almost completely unnoticed until after it passed final reading in the Commons.

Those are just two of many examples and there would be more if the current government had a majority.

In a majority Parliament, for instance, the recent Liberal decision to oppose the government's anti-smuggling bill might have elicited only a media shrug, as it would have no impact on the fate of the legislation.

Even in an arguably more unpredictable minority setting, the fundamental business of Parliament is increasingly marginalized, not only by the daily theatre of question period, but also by the changing nature of the media in general and the parliamentary press in particular.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, a 24/7 news environment offers less rather than more space and time for the extensive Parliamentary reporting of the past.

The demands of feeding a round-the-clock information beast usually favour bite-size news to the detriment of meaty debates that need more time-consuming media ministrations to be properly digested.

The advent of new technologies has also greatly expanded the Canadian political stage.

Premier Danny Williams happened to resign just as the Afghan debate was getting underway in Parliament. The news took everyone by surprise. But it was only a matter of minutes before the media armada was turned around and had set its virtual course for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Parliament used to be the centre stage of the political beat in Canada; now it is on the way to becoming a mere backdrop for the coverage of national politics.

Pierre Trudeau once famously said that MPs were nobodies once they were 50 feet off the Hill. But given Parliament's ongoing slide into relative obscurity, it should come as no surprise that some of the members of Parliament who are about to leave the federal arena have come to feel that they are also nobodies in the House of Commons.

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The Hill Times