



HARPER CONSERVATIVES CHOKING ACCESS TO INFORMATION TO CANADIAN PUBLIC

In a major report to Parliament, Canada's Information Commissioner has declared that the Access to Information (ATI) system is broken.

LACK OF TRANSPERANCY

Information Commissioner Suzanne Legault said that there is a lack of will from the Conservative government to be transparent. She recommended a change to legislation to force the government to comply with time requirements to prevent delays in the release of public information.

Ms. Legault's report shows that average ATI processing times have exploded under the Harper Conservatives. The law says ATI requests are supposed to be completed within 60 days. Yet, nearly 60 percent of requests take up to 120 days to complete under this government. A full 13 percent of them take more than 121 days.

WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

An analysis done last year by the Liberal opposition showed that of the more than 31,000 ATI requests filed in 2007-08, only 17% contained all of the information that was requested. The rest was blacked out, or withheld completely.

Ms. Legault said that growing

delays are eroding Canadians' right to obtain documents from the government, and that this right is at risk of being totally obliterated because delays threaten to render the entire access regime irrelevant.

PRIME MINISTER'S



DEPARTMENT GETS A "D"

In particular, the Information Commissioner gave the Prime Minister's Department (PCO) - a "D" grade for some of the longest delays in all of government, and for interfering in response times in other departments.

Most disturbingly, the delays are not caused simply by bureaucratic red tape - but by political interference from a government committed to stifling damaging

information.

DELIBERATE DECEPTION

Examples include a senior aide to former Public Works Minister Christian Paradis who stopped the release of a sensitive 137-page report requested by a media outlet. The aide ordered officials to "unrelease" the report after the Access to Information office at Public Works **had already determined there was no legal basis for withholding it.** What the media got instead, 82 days later than allowed under the law, was a heavily censored version that had been reduced to 30 pages. An aide to Human Resources and Skills Development Minister Diane Finlay ordered bureaucrats to withhold the wasteful \$5-million price tag on a self-promotion as part of an Olympic advertising blitz. Officials were compelled to tell the media, "We have provided you with all the information available at this point" - when they had the cost of the ad buy in their hands.

Ironically, it is the Prime Minister and the Conservatives who vowed to create a culture of openness and transparency in Ottawa. But, they didn't mean that it should apply to themselves.

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1. Do you agree with Stephen Harper's decision to spend \$1.2 billion on the G8/20? Yes No
2. Do you agree that Stephen Harper showed poor judgment in managing the G8/20? Yes No
3. Whom do you trust to provide you with an effective responsible and progressive government?
 - Joe Volpe and the Liberals
 - Stephen Harper and the Conservatives
 - Jack Layton and the NDP
 - Elizabeth May and the Green Party

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