

Bill worth a look

Michael Chong's bid to reform the manner in which Canadian democracy operates has seen a great many twists and turns.

His effort has seen him repeatedly write on the subject. It has seen him publicly demonstrate the lack of decorum of his parliamentary colleagues over antics in the House of Commons. It has also seen him use parliamentary tools through two terms of federal government to amend and improve such elements of our democracy as question period, and if leaders of political parties should have the final word on whether an individual can be a local candidate for a party.

Finally, he's seen his efforts result in something more tangible than further discussion of the subject.

The Wellington-Halton Hills Conservative MP witnessed his private member's bill— Reform Act 2014— make it through third reading in the House of Commons recently. To achieve this, Chong accepted considerable watering-down of his bill. But the final result remains something with the potential to bring significant change to aspects of our democracy.

It offers a rare example of this parliament reaching a compromise in crafting legislation. Chong asserts it also moved forward in large measure because Canadians demanded that parliamentarians make progress on issues the bill spoke to and that this citizen influence was responsibly heeded. For all those reasons, Chong's achievement merits applause. After having observed so many obstacles in getting this done, Chong has been understandably cautious in considering this journey concluded.

In seemingly all public comments on this bill passing through the House, he's quick to point out it requires Senate approval and royal ascent before the end of this government's term or it dies as legislation.

If our beleaguered Senate wants its future to become a larger election issue than it might already be this year, it should foot-drag on this high-profile reform bill. Chong is right not to assume this bill will be law.

Ultimately, even if Reform Act 2014 is proclaimed, its journey will continue. Due to various opt-in aspects, if it becomes law, future parliamentarians could use this potential legislation to empower themselves and their caucuses to have new powers, such as those related to the turfing of caucus members. Given that the majority government has supported it, we hope Chong's bill sails as it should through the Senate.

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Letters to the editor

Arguments must be factual

Re: Oksana M. Sawiak's letter to the editor that was printed in the Feb. 26 IFP.

Debate is crucial to finding out what is really true. But if one wants one's theory (in this case, that vaccines cause autism) to be taken seriously then one needs to present solid evidence.

It is simply not good enough to stir up debate without presenting real evidence for your position. If real evidence of your position does exist then you should present it.

It did not take me long to learn that the Geiers, whose assertions about autism you are relying upon, have had their research roundly discredited by qualified physicians and scientists. I understand that Mark Geier had his medical license revoked nearly four years ago by the Maryland State Board of Physicians on an emergency basis. According to the board's decision (which is available to the public) Geier was found to have misrepresented his credentials, to have misdiagnosed autistic children with precocious puberty and other genetic ab-

normalities, to have treated the children with potent hormonal therapies that have a substantial risk of both short-term and long-term side effects, and to have in doing all of this "exposed the children to needless risk of harm".

It is also explained in the board's decision that Mark Geier's testimony on behalf of plaintiffs as a supposed expert on Court of Federal Claims and other tribunals has been held to be "intellectually dishonest" and "nothing more than an egregious example of blatant, result-oriented testimony".

It is simply not good enough to rest your case on what this guy says.

As for Thimerosal, which I am to understand does contain "ethyl" (as distinct from "methyl") mercury, according to Health Canada's website, most vaccines licensed in Canada do not use Thimerosal as a preservative. Only influenza and most hepatitis B vaccines contain it.

It is extremely important in my view to note there is a key difference between "ethyl" mercury - which is known to be eliminated rapidly from the body and does not accumulate - and "methyl" mercury which we know can be in some fish and which does accumulate.

Also, according to Health Canada, "Theoretical concerns regarding possible mercury toxicity and link to autism have been dismissed with multiple studies that have found no evidence of a link." I haven't read the studies, but if they are there to read and assess then you should do so if you want to test your theories.

We are all dealing with a lot of information on a daily basis. It is an incredible world, and we need and should welcome dissenters to speak up and present their evidence. But they need to do it in a responsible, evidence-based way.

Matthew Powell
Gilbert's LLP

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