



Matt Hatfield, Executive Director, OpenMedia

Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Re: The need to fix Bill C-4, the so-called “Making Life more Affordable for Canadians” Act

Thursday, February 12, 2026

Opening Remarks (Check against delivery):

Good morning. I’m Matt Hatfield, and I’m Executive Director of OpenMedia, a grassroots community of 230,000 people in Canada that work together for an open, accessible and surveillance-free Internet. I’m joining you from the unceded land of the Tsawout (Say-ut) on Salt Spring Island in BC.

Who protects the rules that make our democracy work? We’re lucky to be heirs to a great democratic tradition that has painstakingly figured a lot out about what those rules should be. Following that tradition, we put in place checks and balances of power between different government bodies. We trust most people in government will usually do the right thing; but we have transparency requirements, external verification, and appeal processes to make sure they do. We don’t let anyone set the rules they themselves will be judged by.

But there’s one group in Canada at the heart of our democracy, who don’t believe they need any external accountability. That’s Canada’s three great federal political parties: the federal Liberals, Conservatives, and the NDP. When it comes to the most sensitive type of data in our whole political system; data about how Canadians vote, and what motivates them to choose one party or another – these three parties have decided between themselves there should be no real oversight over what they’re allowed to do with voter data; no law they have to follow besides rules they write for themselves. Part 4 of Bill C-4 is a crude fig leaf that says whatever vague description a political party puts in the dense legalese of its privacy policy, that’s good enough for Canadian democracy. Parties have argued that following basic privacy law like all other Canadian entities would be too burdensome during an election; yet they could easily be subject to review of their practices after an election, with penalties or conditions applied for their next campaign. C-4’s attempt to immunize parties retroactively back to 2000 from any privacy law makes very clear this is not about setting good practices for future elections, but immunizing them from any accountability for their practices in past or future elections.

When you ask Canadians what the law should be here, we’re of one mind: privacy laws should apply to political parties, just like everyone else. When OpenMedia and BC FIPA polled on this some years back, 72% of Canadians said so, across partisan lines; you don’t see that level of agreement on much else in politics.



The hope of the parties seems to be that this will stay an invisible issue; the system will mostly work, and nothing will ever go too badly wrong. But I am here to tell you that something is going to go very, very badly wrong if you pass C-4's current text into law.

Recently I've met with some of the companies that work for federal political parties to learn about how they do their business. I assure you, they do not talk about anything as basic as "using personal information online" or "employing cookies" like Bill C-4 does when selling their services. They talk about their capacity to geotarget people so tightly they reach only a handful of people in certain physical offices; people like the staffers that work for you. They boast about being able to identify not just that someone is likely to vote, and who they'll probably vote for; but to determine whether that person went to a polling booth on election day and voted.

And that is just the start. We're several years into the AI revolution; long enough that most of us can see AI is not a useless fad. AI bots that create extremely convincing arguments, images, and videos are here to stay, and getting better extremely quickly. We're only just beginning to see what is possible if those bots are turned into agents operating in the external world; AI political operatives who use the vast surveillance data markets we've allowed to exist on every Canadian, and develop specific political pitches to bombard each and every one of us; materials developed with a target audience of just one Canadian voter. What will be possible for parties to do within a few years will make canvassing voters on their doorstep or through their phone look like a pointy stick next to an atom bomb.

We are looking at a bill that will let each individual party set their own rules about what they will do with this technology. That does not make any sense. Politics is an arms race, and in Canada, the party that is first past the post wins the great bulk of the power. You can never rely on self-regulation in an arms race; mutual disarmament, with independent verification that you've complied, is the only way to keep this race from being as destructive to our privacy and democracy as it can be.

That's why I'm asking you to refuse to pass part 4 of Bill C-4 into law. Please insist that the House do the right thing and place political parties under PIPEDA. I know that may be difficult; but I'm asking you to try.

Not everyone understands or believes in the role of Canada's Senate in our democracy. But this is specifically, exactly what you are here to do; to not let the narrow and short term self-interest of the parties in our democracy do serious damage to the system itself. Nearly 5,000 Canadians from OpenMedia's community have written to House leaders to ask them to place parties under real privacy law; I'm asking you to join them.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.