



**Matt Hatfield, Executive Director, OpenMedia**

Senate Committee on Transport and Communications

Re: the need to prepare Canada's democratic systems for the age of AI

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

**Opening Remarks (Check against delivery):**

Good evening. I'm Matt Hatfield, Executive Director of OpenMedia, a grassroots community of 230,000 Canadians working together for an open, accessible and surveillance-free Internet. I'm joining you from the unceded land of the Sto:lo, Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam Nations in Vancouver, BC.

AI is going to destroy our democracy unless we build systems that can stand up to it. I'm going to pause for one second here, because I listened through the last panel's testimony, and I know where the room is at. I'm not telling you this to scare you without an actionable solution. I'm saying it because there's actually a lot Canada can do about it, right now.

My version of this argument doesn't depend on whether you believe in AI's existential risks. It is that the AI we have today, once widely used in predictable ways, will overwhelm the democratic systems we depend on to make our government work. To stop that happening, we need to fortify Canada's governance and communications systems, starting now.

Last year, researchers at SEO firm Graphite estimated that 52% of new Internet content was being created by AI — up from less than 10% before ChatGPT. But this is just the beginning. As AI agents become cheaper and more capable, the human part of the Internet is going to shrink and shrink. It's being called the 'dead Internet' — a world where almost everything online is bots talking to bots.

What does that mean for our ability to run a human-driven democracy? Many of you probably first knew OpenMedia when your office got an email from an ordinary Canadian participating in one of our campaigns. We provide form letters as a starting point — some people send them as written, many add their own thoughts, some delete the whole thing and tell you we've got it completely wrong! For us, all of it is a meaningful pulse check; one of the key ways our system receives the heartbeat of the public between elections.

AI agents are poised to sweep all of this away. Look at Minister Solomon's deeply flawed consultation on AI. His office reported 11,300 responses — but requested no identifying details about participants. We have no idea how many were real Canadians, legitimate organizations, or AI agents working for whoever programmed them. And that was just half of this consultation's democratic deficit: his office then condensed all the feedback using AI tools. Was a single word written by a Canadian read by any human in government? We simply don't know.



That's the future we're barreling towards — one where formally, democracy keeps trucking; but citizens aren't participating in any meaningful sense, and the government isn't listening in any meaningful sense. Procedural legitimacy maintained; actual democracy hollowed out.

I highly recommend the book your previous witness Nathan Sanders co-authored with Bruce Schneier, *Rewiring Democracy*; they argue AI can be an ally for democracy. I want to make the converse point: without action, AI will be enormously destructive to it. Initially as a denial of service attack, AI will flood voters and government alike with plausible-seeming false content until meaningful choice becomes impossible. Then, as AI grows more sophisticated, something more virus-like — probing obscure corners of our laws and regulations to undermine legislative intent.

I have four recommendations to harden our democracy today. First, Canada should create a purpose-built civic engagement tool — one that verifies you're a real Canadian resident without harvesting your data, makes it easy to follow and engage government consultations, and gives our government a tamper-proof record of public input. Estonia has led the way here; Canada should follow.

Second, we need an authentication system for fact-based journalism. Give news organizations, libraries, and platforms a way to cryptographically verify that content originated from a known, accountable source and hasn't been altered — a postmark and seal of authenticity combined. Not a government stamp of approval on *content*, but a verifiable *record of origin* and *chain of custody*. The CBC, the Globe, a community newspaper in Sudbury — all of them could sign their journalism this way to enhance public trust.

Third, we need legislation demanding algorithmic transparency from platforms, and giving Canadians real choice over the algorithms shaping our media diet. It was a mistake for us to allow our primary means of communication to be platforms driven by algorithms that maximize engagement — the time we spend on platforms amused or outraged — and nothing else. Now is the time to correct it, before the persuasive power of those algorithms is fully integrated with the conversational power of AI agents.

Lastly, our government needs to get serious about reform of data handling and public transparency. Up until now, public data that is hard to access, delayed, or incomplete, has often been an asset to parts of government; it has dampened people noticing truths whoever is in power finds inconvenient. But moving forward, when government information is not credible, AI disinformation that appears more complete and more honest will rapidly fill the gap. Mandatory proactive disclosure of government contracts and consultations in machine-readable formats, and an access to information system that delivers useful results in a reasonable timespan, are no longer just good governance — they will be necessary to prove to people that anything our government says is true.

*OpenMedia is a community-based organization that works to  
keep the Internet open, affordable, and surveillance free.*



The dead Internet is coming whether we like it or not. But a human-centered digital democracy can be built that will flourish inside of it, if Canada starts acting today.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.