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National groups query Stephen Harper on failure to fulfil 2006 Access to Information promises

Ottawa/Toronto/Vancouver – Three national organizations concerned about openness and accountability in government have written to Prime Minister Stephen Harper to ask what became of the Conservatives' 2006 campaign promises to reform the *Access to Information Act*.

The Canadian Newspaper Association, Canadian Taxpayers Federation and BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA) are attempting to put the issue on the front burner of the federal election campaign during "Right to Know Week" in Canada – a week devoted to promoting Citizens' rights of access to government information.

"The Prime Minister made a number of specific commitments to reform the Access to Information Act," said FIPA Executive Director Darrell Evans. "We want to make sure that these important democratic reforms don't fall by the wayside."

The letter to Stephen Harper states, "We are concerned that your government's actions since it assumed power in 2006 have not matched the commitments you made as leader of the Conservative Party during the 2006 election campaign – specifically, your commitment to open up the inner workings of government to scrutiny by reforming Canada's Access to Information Act.

The eight commitments related to Access to Information contained in the 2006 Conservative platform were:

- ◆ To implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations for reform of the *Access to Information Act*.
- ◆ To give the Information Commissioner the power to order the release of information.
- ◆ To expand the coverage of the act to all Crown corporations, Officers of Parliament, foundations and organizations that spend taxpayers' money or perform public functions.
- ◆ To subject the exclusion of Cabinet confidences to review by the Information Commissioner.
- ◆ To oblige public officials to create the records necessary to document their actions and decisions.
- ◆ To provide a general public interest override for all exemptions, so that the public interest is put before the secrecy of the government.
- ◆ To ensure that all exemptions from the disclosure of government information are justified only on the basis of the harm or injury that would result from disclosure, not blanket exemption rules; and
- ◆ To ensure that the disclosure requirements of the *Access to Information Act* cannot be circumvented by secrecy provisions in other federal acts.

“The government has had a number of opportunities to put these important improvements into law,” said CNA president John Hinds. “Canadians are still waiting for action.”

The promised Access to Information reforms were originally intended to be part of the government’s centrepiece *Accountability Act*, but were deferred and seem to have become a casualty of politics-as-usual in Ottawa.

“Governments tax almost half our incomes and control our lives in significant ways. The information they collect is not *their* information, it’s *our* information,” said Adam Taylor, Acting Federal Director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. “Citizens should not have to beg on bended knee to see what rightly belongs to them unless a clear privacy or security consideration can be shown.”

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Link to letter to Hon. Stephen Harper:

[http://fipa.bc.ca/library/Law_Reform_Activities/LETTERS/Letter to Hon. S. Harper-Sept 29 08.doc](http://fipa.bc.ca/library/Law_Reform_Activities/LETTERS/Letter_to_Hon._S._Harper-Sept_29_08.doc)

RIGHT TO KNOW WEEK URL: http://www.righttoknow.ca/home/index_e.php