



democracy Watch
émocratie en surveillance

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Nancy Bélanger, Commissioner
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July 17, 2019

RE:

- 1. Request for independent, impartial ruling on complaint filed on July 12, 2017, and;**
- 2. Request that you recuse yourself from conducting investigation and ruling on the above matter because you were chosen and appointed by the Trudeau Cabinet, and also because of your statements showing bias against effective enforcement**

Dear Commissioner Bélanger:

I am writing on behalf of Democracy Watch concerning enforcement of the federal *Lobbying Act* (the “*Act*”) generally, and specifically requesting an independent ruling under the *Act* and the *Lobbyists’ Code of Conduct* (“*Lobbyists’ Code*”) on the complaint Democracy Watch filed with the office of the Commissioner of Lobbying on July 12, 2017.

Democracy Watch requested in the complaint letter that former Commissioner of Lobbying Karen Shepherd recuse herself from ruling on the complaint because she was handpicked for a six-month interim term by the Trudeau Cabinet, and we request that you also recuse yourself from ruling on the complaint because you were also handpicked by the Trudeau Cabinet, and for other reasons set out below.

1. Request for independent, impartial ruling on complaint filed on July 12, 2017

Democracy Watch filed with the office of the Commissioner of Lobbying on July 12, 2017. You can see the complaint letter at:

<https://democracywatch.ca/wp-content/uploads/LettToFedLobbyCommReCCIJul122017.pdf>

You can see the letter from the office of the Commissioner of Lobbying sent to Democracy Watch on July 20, 2017 confirming that its complaint was being investigated at:

<https://democracywatch.ca/wp-content/uploads/LettFromLobbyCommApptReCCIJul202017-1.pdf>

Democracy Watch's complaint letter contained extensive, detailed evidence concerning the alleged violation of former Rule 8, and current Rules 6-9, of the *Lobbyists' Code*. There is no justifiable reason for failing to issue a ruling in the past two years.

Please confirm by reply letter that a ruling will be issued on this complaint before Parliament is dissolved for the fall election. Voters have a right to know before they vote whether the lobbyists complained about have violated the *Lobbyists' Code*.

2. Request that you recuse yourself from investigating and ruling on the above matter

On January 25, 2018, and again on April 20, 2018, I sent you a letter on behalf of Democracy Watch requesting that you recuse yourself from investigating and ruling on all matters concerning the Trudeau Cabinet and Liberal MPs because you were nominated for the position of Commissioner of Lobbying by Prime Minister Trudeau after a process that was controlled by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Cabinet and involved officials from the PMO, the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board, including the Director of Public Appointments in the PMO and the Chief of Staff for Treasury Board Minister Scott Brison.

The PMO- and Cabinet-controlled appointment process did not include consultation with opposition parties as required under subsection 4.1(1) of the *Lobbying Act* as the opposition parties made clear in public statements. As you know, Democracy Watch filed an application for judicial review of your appointment in Federal Court based on the reasonable apprehension of bias and conflict of interest on the part of the Trudeau Cabinet when appointing you.

Democracy Watch's position is that you share this reasonable apprehension of bias because you were chosen through a process controlled by the Trudeau Cabinet, a process that failed to consult with opposition parties as required by

subsection 4.1(1) of the *Lobbying Act*. Your appointment was approved in the House of Commons only on division, as several MPs voted against your appointment.

Democracy Watch's letter to you of January 25, 2018 can be seen at:

<https://democracywatch.ca/wp-content/uploads/LettToLobbyCommReApptBiasComplaintsJan252018-1.pdf>

Democracy Watch's letter to you of April 20, 2018 can be seen at:

<https://democracywatch.ca/wp-content/uploads/LettToLobbyCommReRecusal4ComplaintsApr202018-1.pdf>

As well, Democracy Watch's position is that you made statements when testifying on December 6, 2017 before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, and when testifying in the Senate, concerning your nomination that show a bias toward weak and incorrect enforcement of the *Act*. While her nomination as Lobbying Commissioner was being reviewed by the House and Senate and after her appointment, Nancy Bélanger made several public statements that show bias in favour of lobbyists and public office holders, including:

- a) that you see your goal to “leave [your] mark” by increasing Canadians’ “trust in those who make the decisions, that is to say public office holders”;
- b) that “Canadians need to understand that lobbying is okay; it's a good thing”;
- c) that you see your mandate as “collaborating” with lobbyists as “That is the only way to ensure that I have credibility”;
- d) that when asked by a senator what you would do “...to combat this public cynicism about those who have privileged access to power and influence?” you said “My perspective is that lobbying is an activity that all Canadians should understand is in their best interest” and;
- e) that you have “confidence in lobbyists’ willingness to work in compliance with the established rules. I will work collaboratively with lobbyists...” and that the tenth anniversary of the Office in June 2018 is an opportunity to “renew our commitment to working with lobbyists, [and] public office holders...”

Your mandate under subsection 4.2(2) of the *Lobbying Act* does include “programs to foster public awareness” – but not to foster public belief that lobbying is “a good thing” or that Canadians should “trust” public office holders. Instead, subsection 4.2(2) mandates you to foster public awareness “of the requirements of this Act, particularly on the part of lobbyists, their clients and public office holders.”

Neither subsection 4.2(2) nor any other section in the *Act* mentions that your mandate, duties or functions are to “work collaboratively with lobbyists.” Your role is therefore clearly focused on enforcement of the *Act*, and you have quasi-judicial powers of enforcement.

Therefore, your statement that you have “confidence in lobbyists’ willingness to work in compliance with the established rules” creates a reasonable apprehension of bias against effective enforcement of the *Act*. You have no basis for such confidence – no one can know in advance of examining any situation that the lobbyists involved are willing to comply with the rules.

For the above reasons, and also in the interest of ensuring the requirements and interpretation and enforcement standards set out above in section 1 are strictly and strongly upheld, Democracy Watch requests that you do not investigate or rule on the matter addressed in this letter, and that instead you delegate the investigation and ruling to a provincial ethics or lobbying commissioner who has no ties to any federal or provincial political party.

Please contact Democracy Watch at the address above if you need any more information to initiate and delegate the above requested investigation.

As well, given that Democracy Watch’s July 12, 2017 complaint letter contained extensive details, and given two years have passed, and given there is no justifiable reason for any further delay, we expect that the ruling on the complaint will be issued in mid-August on the designated day for tabling documents in the House of Commons and the Senate.

Sincerely,



Duff Conacher, Co-founder of Democracy Watch
on behalf of the Board of Directors of Democracy Watch