

Claire Hoiy ? No chance of it happening



Ignorance, as they say, is bliss. Which is no doubt what NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair is counting on as he promotes his online petition to abolish the Senate in the wake of the ongoing spending scandals by a few of inhabitants of the so-called chamber of sober second thought.

Not ignorance in the sense of rudeness, but in the traditional sense of a lack of knowledge about how the system actually works. For the fact is, as much as you may wish to abolish the Senate ? and polls show that a lot of Canadians would love to ? there is absolutely no chance of that happening. None. Zippo!

Why not, you ask?

For the simple reason that because of our current constitution ? the one brought to us courtesy of current Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau's father Pierre and the premiers of the day ? it would take the approval of all 10 provinces, plus the House of Commons, plus the Senate, to abolish it.

That's not going to happen. Ever.

The constitution does allow some changes with the approval of at least seven provinces representing at least 50 per cent of the population, but most constitutional experts say abolishing the place would need unanimous support. But even the lesser formula isn't going to happen.

Mulcair, of course, is doing what politicians do, i.e. jumping on a current issue to make political points for himself. That's fair enough. After all, the NDP have always been highly critical of the Senate, so it's not as if he's changing his party's direction by leading a parade to nuke the place.

But just ask yourself this: do you really ? I mean really ? want the whole constitutional ball of wax opened up for debate at a time when there is a separatist government in Quebec? Do you really think the debate could be opened up and restricted just to the Senate? Think about it.

This isn't a serious problem for Mulcair because, let's face it, since he's been leading the NDP he's spent most of his time pushing Quebec's interests above those of the rest of Canada, so the prospect of his friends in the separatist movement having another run at our constitution obviously doesn't bother him.

It should, however, bother you.

As for Justin Trudeau, he came out on the weekend and dissed Mulcair's online petition ? while arguing, correctly I believe, that the Senate, despite its current problems, actually serves a useful function in our parliamentary system.

Most Canadians have no idea what the Senate actually does. That's mainly because the media ? except when there is an ongoing ?scandal? ? totally ignores it, so unless you're a political wonk, you likely don't know how much work the Senate does reviewing, and routinely improving, legislation before it becomes law.

Trudeau went on to say that even if the federal government wanted to get into the constitutional mess again ? which, by the way, Prime Minister Stephen Harper isn't likely to ? they shouldn't do it without first consulting the provinces.

Well, duh! That may sound as wise as Mulcair claiming the Senate can be abolished if enough people sign his petition. But it's just as facile. Of course the provinces have to be consulted before Ottawa can change the constitution. That's because, as mentioned previously, the amending formula involves them just as much as it involves the federal government.

And while we're on the subject, there has been an awful lot of air time and print space used up for a few weeks now over what really,

by any yardstick, is a pretty minor affair.

By all means punish the few Senators who apparently are double-dipping, but for heaven's sake, let's get real here. A couple of weeks ago we learned that years ago, Mulcair, as a provincial MLA, said he was offered a bribe, yet he didn't report it to the police at the time. Why not? Surely that's a tad more serious than Mike Duffy getting \$90,000 from Harper's former top aide to pay off something he shouldn't have been getting in the first place.

Earlier in this decade, actually, three Liberal MPs were caught charging for housing allowances they didn't deserve, and we barely heard a peep about it. That's because ? and here's irony for you ? the Commons deals with these things in private through the secretive Board of Internal Economy while the Senate, for all the flak it's taking, actually made the audits of the senators public. So when you talk about being open, point your finger at the right place.

Go ahead and sign Mulcair's petition if you wish, but be aware it's kind of like sitting in your car yelling at the driver ahead of you. He can't hear you.

And it won't change a thing he was doing. But it just might make you feel better. That's the best you can hope for.