

Political science



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Laws are like locks they only serve to keep honest people honest. The Federal Accountability Act and Action Plan that the Government of Canada is launching is based on the premise that people in government and those attempting to attain positions in government, as well as contributors, lobbyists, and leaders of industry, unions, and political parties, are basically honest and transparent. Who is to say that the people who will be enforcing this act are going to be any less susceptible to bribery and influence than the people that they are regulating? A lot of assumptions are being made with the passing into action of this Act and Action Plan. You can not wipe out cronyism and lobbyist influence with these laws, only increase the possibility of subterfuge on the part of those who would influence or be influenced. The reforming of political party financing is an excellent example. Annual contributions from individuals to a registered political party are going to be restricted to \$1, 000. This cap will also be placed on those made by corporations, unions, and organizations. This is an excellent plan, in theory, but there are ways to get around it. Does the government have the ability and finances to ferret out the origins of every \$1, 000 contribution individuals make? If they are not currently capable of patrolling the party's contributors now, what makes them think that they will be able to in the future. Someone, say a union official, can pay someone else, or several someones, to make contributions and as long as they stay within the proscribed limits, unless it can be proven otherwise through thorough investigation, no law has clearly been broken. These people are still exerting political influence within the confines of the Act.

Influence and money are still being applied to the same ends as they were before, even though they are being done legally. In a capitalist country,

money will out, and it doesn't matter how many laws there are in effect, including the banning of secret donations to political candidates, people will be turned to others' ways of thinking and voting. A considerable number of \$499 gifts can be slid under the Federal Accountability Act's radar under these new rules to finance candidates. And if the people who are trying to enter politics or are currently involved in politics and their parties are not considered to be strictly honest then how can anyone assume that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner will be any more unimpeachable?

Finally, lobbying has always been a part of government. Lobbyists are in action now that have not complied with registration requirements in the past. Laws were already in effect that required monetary penalties for lobbyists failing to properly register. Doubling the monetary penalty is not going to be enough of a threat to those involved, when one considers that the influence these people gain through their monetary and other benefits to politicians far outweighs the risk of prosecution. The Federal Accountability Act and Action Plan at best, presents obstacles to be overcome by politicians and influence peddlers, and at worst, assumes that people involved in politics are basically honest.