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NEWS RELEASE

Direct election of senators not essential for effective reform

Study explores changes that could enhance Senate's legitimacy

Montreal – The prime minister's unfettered power over the appointment of senators and the way it has been used for partisan purposes has been the most important factor undermining the legitimacy of the Senate. While direct election of the Senate is too ambitious a goal, revisiting the way senators are chosen is a more practical option, one that would be congruent with a range of interests associated with parliamentary reform, according to a new study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy.

The study, "Political Legitimacy for an Appointed Senate," by Campbell Sharman, examines the differing assumptions about the purpose of the Senate, as well as the goals for reform and the methods of achieving them. While the author stresses the importance of the Senate's role in scrutinizing legislation and executive action, he insists that partisan considerations cannot be ignored if Senate reform is going to be successful. "Ignoring these issues and generating ambitious plans for large-scale constitutional change is a recipe for failure," says Sharman.

The experience of reform of the United Kingdom House of Lords adds weight to the view that the legitimacy of a second parliamentary chamber can be enhanced through some institutional changes, such as balanced partisan nominations, even when appointment is retained as the selection method.

Legislation introduced by the Conservative government during the last parliamentary session would have provided for consultative votes on Senate nominees and reduced senators' terms to eight years.

"Political Legitimacy for an Appointed Senate," by Campbell Sharman, can be downloaded free of charge from www.irpp.org.

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