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NEWS RELEASE

*Canada Must Fix Its Accountability Framework to Cure  
the Democratic Deficit*

***Institute for  
Research on  
Public Policy***

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**Montreal** – Canada's democratic deficit extends beyond the role of Parliament; it affects every democratic institution of the country. The common thread in all of these institutions is that accountability is frayed and confused, says Thomas S. Axworthy in a new *Working Paper* released today by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP.org).

"We will not cure the 'structural' democratic deficit until we eradicate the accountability deficit," argues Axworthy. In this paper entitled, "Addressing the accountability deficit: Why Paul Martin's minority government must pay more attention to the three A's," he examines the lack of accountability mechanisms in various spheres of governance from the electoral system and political parties, to Parliament and the workings of the public service.

Axworthy examines the concepts of authority, accountability and answerability and argues that a clearly defined accountability system is fundamental to our system of representative democracy. "For citizens to be engaged they must have sufficient information to assess performance, they must be able to assign responsibility for performance or non-performance, and then the system must reflect voters' intentions in rewarding or punishing performance."

According to Axworthy, "Canada's accountability framework fails these three clear tests." He cites as examples the events surrounding the al-Mashat Affair in 1991, the Human Resources debacle of 2000 and the more recent sponsorship scandal, which demonstrate that it has become more and more difficult to untangle where responsibility for actions lies.

Axworthy proposes the following six-point plan to enhance accountability in our democratic system of governance:

1. Establish a small blue ribbon committee of notables charged with developing accountability guidelines and benchmarks and presenting them to Parliament.
2. Designate deputy ministers as accountability officers of their departments.
3. Allocate at least 20 percent of the election-spending subsidy to independent party policy foundations.
4. Arrange with the networks a commitment to broadcast a series of policy debates between party spokesperson prior to the final leaders' debate.
5. Allocate more policy expertise resources to Parliament, starting with the creation of a Parliamentary Budget Office.
6. Ensure that at least one-third of the senators are opposition senators and that twenty percent are suggested by an independent Appointment Commission with a mandate to suggest names reflecting Canadian diversity and expertise.

"Addressing the accountability deficit: Why Paul Martin's minority government must pay more attention to the three A's" is the latest *Working Paper* study to be released as part of the IRPP's Strengthening Canadian Democracy series. It is now available on-line in Adobe (.pdf) format on the Institute's Web site ([www.irpp.org](http://www.irpp.org)).

For more information or to request an interview, please contact the IRPP.

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