



November 12, 2004

**MEMORANDUM FOR LEADERS  
OF FEDERAL POLITICAL PARTIES**

***ENHANCING THE INFLUENCE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT  
BY STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES***

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The business community consistently has supported efforts to improve the way Parliament works in order to enhance accountability and public trust. In particular, we agree that the new minority Parliament provides a critical opportunity to enhance the influence of individual Members of Parliament of all parties through expansion of the role of Parliament committees.

From the point of view of economic policy, the most important regular process is the annual pre-budget consultation by the Standing Committee on Finance of the House of Commons. This process always attracts a large number of individuals and organizations seeking to offer advice, and given the late opening of the new Parliament and the inflexibility of the budget calendar, this year's hearings necessarily have been highly compressed.

We could not help noting, however, as did *The Globe and Mail* in a story on the front page of its *Report on Business*, that only four of the 12 regular members of the Finance Committee were on hand for our appearance on November 4, 2004. This was despite the fact that seven of the largest business organizations in the country, representing hundreds of thousands of enterprises large and small from coast to coast, had agreed on only ten days notice to make our annual submissions at a time set by and presumably convenient for the Committee and its members.

There may well have been extenuating circumstances in this one instance, but it does at the very least suggest that Members of Parliament from all parties are missing an important opportunity to shape the federal government's economic agenda and both the general thrust and particular elements of the 2005 budget -- the next document to be presented to the House that must trigger a vote of confidence.

We believe that the make-up of the current Parliament at a time of considerable discussion of democratic reform creates the potential to make committees the centre of the action both in considering bold new ideas to serve the needs of

Canadians and in influencing the development of legislation across the full range of issues that come before the House.

Committees, however, can be only as effective as their members choose to make them. We hope that the leaders of all parties will urge the members of their respective caucuses to seize the current opportunity and show Canadians just how creative and effective a minority Parliament can be.

Given the greater workload and responsibilities that flow from the need to consider more bills at the draft stage and to deal with the greater likelihood of substantive amendments that may be put forward, party leaders also should consider whether Parliamentary committees would benefit from greater resources. In particular, it may be appropriate to provide committees with dedicated research staff capable of investigating proposals and verifying or expanding on information presented by witnesses or brought forward by members.

As always, our organizations will not limit our Parliamentary activities to committee chambers. We look forward to the usual healthy exchange of ideas and views on a regular basis with each of you and with Members of Parliament from every party and every region.

At the same time, we would urge you to ensure that the members of your respective caucuses respond to the strong public thirst for a more effective and accountable Parliament and take full advantage of the potential to make its committees the central vehicle for discussing and debating ideas that could improve the standard of living and quality of life of Canadians.



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