



## Corruption and the Media: The Vicious Circle

**Honourable John Gomery**

Former Superior Court of Quebec Judge and  
Public Inquiry Commissioner

May 10, 2019

9:00am – 4:30pm

### Summary

In recent months, our news cycle has been inundated with stories of possibly unethical or criminal behavior, allegations of inappropriate pressure, calls for investigations into corruption, and a seemingly endless trail of ethical dilemmas. While the media plays an important role in identifying and drawing the public's attention to bad behavior on the part of elected representatives and governments, this attention may also have serious negative effects on public perceptions of the political process and the players involved.

One very important tool for investigating the actions of public officials that is available to our democracy, is the Public Inquiry. Inquiries are designed to gather information and evidence, provide reasoned and well-researched recommendations, and ideally, help to avoid future misconduct or mismanagement that can both negatively affect the institutions and individuals at the very core of our democracy as well as destroy public perceptions. But how effective are these tools? And what consequences do they have on democracy?

Honourable Justice John H. Gomery was the Public Inquiry Commissioner responsible for investigating the allegations of corruption and collusion relating to the Sponsorship Program, a scandal that so deeply tarnished the last Liberal government. His mandate also included providing recommendations for future governments to avoid "mismanagement". But how have those recommendations fared?

In his workshop, Justice Gomery will explore the impact his Commission had on government administration. He will discuss the fate of some of his recommendations, the ways in which commissions such as his can sift through political rhetoric to get at the root of the problem, as well as how they can help governments to avoid corruption and scandal in the future. Finally, Gomery will tackle the ways in which the media can help rather than hinder the proper functioning of democracy.



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## Outline

1. **Checks and Balances for Democracy: what tools do we have?**
  - a. The Media
    - i. How does it help?
    - ii. What are the negative consequences of media attention?
  - b. The Public Inquiry
    - i. What is it?
    - ii. How does it work?
    - iii. Is it effective?
    - iv. The importance of evidence
2. **The Gomery Commission**
  - a. Who was involved and what were the recommendations?
  - b. What was the impact?
  - c. What were some important lessons learned?
3. **Bettering Democracy through Increased Scrutiny**
  - a. Tools to sift through the political rhetoric
  - b. Should there be more inquiries?
  - c. The public, the media, and transparency
  - d. Preserving civil debate
  - e. The paradox of greater transparency

## Required Readings\*

- Government of Canada. 2005. *Who is Responsible? Summary* Reference Cat. No: CP32-86/1-2005-1  
[http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/003/008/099/003008-disclaimer.html?orig=/100/206/301/pco-bcp/commissions/sponsorship-ef/06-02-10/www.gomery.ca/en/phase1report/summary/es\\_full\\_v01.pdf](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/003/008/099/003008-disclaimer.html?orig=/100/206/301/pco-bcp/commissions/sponsorship-ef/06-02-10/www.gomery.ca/en/phase1report/summary/es_full_v01.pdf)
- Witelson, Tamar. 2003. "Declaration of Independence" in *Commissions of Inquiry: Praise or Reappraise*. (eds) Allan Manson & David Mullan, eds. Toronto: Irwin Law, pp. 301-360.  
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?144352AE>
- Savoie, Donald J. 2003. "Introduction" in *Breaking the Bargain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 3-20. <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?1441C261>
- Savoie, Donald J. 1999. "Introduction" in *Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 3-16. <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF1599>
- Gomery. 2008. "Transparency and Access to Information". *Journal of Parliamentary and Political Law* 4.  
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?144B4338>

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- Allan Manson & David Mullan. 2003. *Commissions of Inquiry: Praise or Reappraise*. Toronto: Irwin Law, 2003.
- Savoie, Donald J. 2003. *Breaking the Bargain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Savoie, Donald J. 1999. *Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

\*If you are registered for non-credit and are unable to locate the readings, please contact us at [wssr@concordia.ca](mailto:wssr@concordia.ca)

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