

# Where's the fall agenda? [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Ibbitson, John

**Source:** Globe and Mail

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 19 Aug 2004

## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Not too long ago, a Liberal cabinet minister was asked what would be the government's legislative agenda when Parliament resumes in October. That's obvious, he replied: health care, child care and aid to cities. This is what the party campaigned on.

But none of that is legislative, came the reply. It can all be done through regulation or placed in the February budget. What actual bills will the Paul Martin government bring forward in the fall?

The minister frowned. "You know, I hadn't thought of that."

Yesterday, the Prime Minister's Office announced a batch of new appointments. Most notably, defeated cabinet minister Hélène Scherrer will replace Francis Fox as principal secretary, while Karl Littler, Mr. Martin's chief political organizer in Ontario, becomes deputy chief of staff. With the deck chairs nicely shuffled, attention turns to the Martin government's actual legislative agenda -- the focus of which is far from clear.

The Martin government won't be eager to crowd the docket, since the Liberals lack a majority in Parliament, and defeats can be embarrassing. Nonetheless, the devil makes work for idle parliamentarians. And if the media have no actual governing agenda to report on, then they will fill their pages and their newscasts with other material -- say, the latest shocking revelations coming out of the Gomery inquiry into the sponsorship mess, or the progress of lawsuits launched by fired Crown corporation executives.

One option would be to legislate even if legislation isn't necessary. Whatever changes to the federal role in health care that emerge from the first ministers summit in September can probably be managed through regulations or budget measures. Nonetheless, the Liberals may introduce a health-care bill that codifies those changes, to maximize publicity and keep the House busy. There may also be a bill enshrining Social Development Minister Ken Dryden's national child care program.

The truth is, however, that a party that once boasted of embarking on "transformative change" remains uncertain of just what that change should be. Reversing the economic decline of Atlantic Canada, negotiating free-trade agreements with Brazil, Taiwan, India (somebody, anybody), creating, training and funding a first-class rapid deployment force, rewriting the social contract with the first nations -- this would be the agenda of a truly activist government. Instead, the talk at lunch is about the turf war between Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

In Ottawa, the parliamentary agenda will be overshadowed by the Martin government's efforts to restructure the public service. The bureaucracy correctly fears that restructuring really means shedding jobs and cutting funding, which is partly why Treasury Board President Reg Alcock and Revenue Minister John McCallum are meeting such resistance. But the government is committed to saving \$3-billion in program spending this year and, if all else fails, it will go ahead with an across-the-board cut, which is always the worst way for the government to save money.

These are the desultory concerns of an empty capital, where everyone who matters is still at the cottage. But the Liberals are going to have to start acting like a federal government sooner or later, before people start to notice how easy it is to get along without one.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** legislation and regulation <sup>[3]</sup>

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/08/wheres-fall-agenda-ca>

## Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/08/wheres-fall-agenda-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>