

May 2, 2005
A L E R T !

Update on Anti-marriage Bill C-38

The response to the Alert bulletin of April 20th to ask MPs to speak to Bill C-38 was excellent. It resulted in many pro-marriage MPs placing their names on the Order Paper and they filled the speaking slots available at that time.

The Liberals, however, have restricted speeches by the MPs on the same-sex marriage issue to 10 minutes each with no debate permitted. As a result, even if the whole Conservative Caucus were now to speak on the issue, it would not take many days before the vote on second reading would nevertheless be called. Consequently, we expect that second reading of the bill can no longer be delayed and that the vote on second reading of the anti-marriage Bill C-38 will take place shortly.

Once second reading has taken place, the bill goes to Committee. We can expect the Committee's review to last for only about a week, as the Committee will probably only hear "technical" witnesses – which means officials from the Justice Department only, and certainly not from the general public.

After the Committee review, the bill will return to the House of Commons for third reading and debate and final vote.

At the time of third reading, the Conservatives will make numerous amendments to the bill, in order to extend the debate as long as possible. It is important that this debate be extended, so that the bill not be sent to the Senate. This is due to the fact that we have learned that if the bill reaches the Senate, it is the intention of the Liberal government to whisk Bill C-38 through the Senate with first, second and third reading to be completed in as little as one or two days only. This will be accomplished by dispensing with the Senate's Committee review stage. Instead, the bill in the Senate will go directly to third reading after the second reading vote. Unfortunately, there are precedents in the Senate to dispense with a committee review. With the overwhelming number of Liberal Senators and the relative handful of Conservative ones, it is anticipated that the bill would be quickly disposed of by the Senate and passed into law.

Confusion in Ottawa

In the meantime, as you know, there is considerable political confusion in Ottawa right now and the situation there changes not just day to day, but from hour to hour.

We do know that the Conservatives intend to bring in a vote of non-confidence on the budget, or on another non-confidence motion – but just when and how it will take place is unclear. The Conservatives (99 seats) and BQ (54 seats), with a total of 153 votes will be against the Liberal's (131 seats), not counting Peter Milliken, who only votes to break a tie, together with the NDP (19 seats) which total 150 seats. This makes for a very close vote, since in order to pass, the non-confidence vote must be supported by 155 MPs (there are a total of 308 MPs in the House of Commons). Ultimately the outcome of the non-confidence motion depends on the votes of three Independent MPs, Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga-Erindale, Ontario), who has declared she will vote with the Liberals. David Kilgour (Edmonton-Beaumont, Alberta) and Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, British Columbia). Two Conservative MPs, Darrel Stinson (North Okanagan-Shuswap, British Columbia), Dave Chatters (Westlock-St. Paul, Alberta) are both very ill with cancer, but it is hoped that they will be able to be present for the non-confidence vote. One seat is empty and awaiting a by-election.

Until such time, however, as a non-confidence motion is hopefully passed, we trust that Bill C-38 will become bogged down in the House of Commons. If the government is defeated on the non-confidence motion, then Parliament will close down and Bill C-38 thankfully will die on the Order Paper. If the non-confidence motion fails, however, then Bill C-38 will sail through Parliament and become law.

We are at a critical point in our history.

Please contact David Kilgour and Chuck Cadman requesting that they vote in support of a Conservative non-confidence motion.

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This Alert bulletin is just an update of what is now taking place, we'll try to update you further on this matter as soon as we obtain more information.

