

## Lawyers vow to fight law giving minister dramatically increased powers

GLORIA GALLOWAY  
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OTTAWA — The legal community is preparing to fight legislation that would give the Immigration Minister more control over who gets into the country, and a Liberal MP says his party must oppose the measures even though doing so could trigger an election.

Alex Stojicevic, the chair of the immigration section of the Canadian Bar Association, said yesterday that lawyers such as he have not been given much opportunity to react to the immigration changes.

But the members of his association are very concerned, Mr. Stojicevic said.

"The chorus has been quite loud in dismay."

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Mr. Stojicevic said he will make his case against the proposals to the Commons immigration committee, which is preparing to travel the country to hear from Canadians on other matters. His association, which represents 859 immigration lawyers, will also be calling members of Parliament to express displeasure. And it will issue a press release to outline its position this week.

Under the proposed law, the Immigration Minister would be permitted to cap the list of people waiting to be accepted into Canada. The government would also be able to reject an applicant who had been approved by immigration officers. And the minister could unilaterally make decisions about immigration policy that, under the current system, require regulatory changes.

But critics say the proposals will gut the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and remove transparency from the system.

"If this budget bill passes with this [immigration changes], it will have repercussions on immigration going forward," Mr. Stojicevic said. "It basically creates a glass tower in which the minister can decide, by fiat, what is going to be done in immigration."

Andrew Telegdi, a Liberal MP from Kitchener, Ont., said, "It shouldn't be passed into law," with respect to the proposals that Immigration Minister Diane Finley describes as necessary to attract the types of immigrants that are being demanded by Canadian employers.

"Immigration will continue to be the lifeblood of this country," Mr. Telegdi said. "If we have this kind of legislation, it's going to give those people who want to apply to ... Canada a chill."

The Liberal Party will have to make this issue a line in the sand, he said, "or we have to campaign on changing it as soon as we get in. One of the two."

The problem for the Liberals, however, is that voting against the budget bill to prevent changes to the immigration act would plunge the country into an election.

Mr. Telegdi said he was ready to hit the campaign trail after last fall's Throne Speech, so opposing a confidence motion does not frighten him.

But Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion has repeatedly demonstrated his distaste for taking the country to the polls. When asked about the immigration issue during a swing through Eastern Canada yesterday, Mr. Dion said he has many questions about what is being proposed and will talk to his caucus about how to proceed.

Meanwhile, the New Democrats say they will introduce an amendment to the budget bill that would remove the immigration changes.

And Bloc MP Pierre Paquette said yesterday that his party would support that amendment, which is also likely to be a confidence matter.

That means, if Mr. Dion is not yet ready for an election, his caucus would once again have to vote with the Conservatives, stage a mass absence at the time of the vote, or sit on their hands in abstention.

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