



Opinion

Innovation can't wait: Parliament must act now to protect privacy and position Canada to succeed in the evolving digital economy

As Bill C-11 languishes on the order paper, we're losing a critical window of opportunity to legislate in support of consumers and business.



John Wiltshire

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Canada's laws governing privacy are from another time. Two decades ago, to be exact, when laptop computers were clunky and wireless devices had just launched. So why are Canadian consumers and business still relying on an outdated law for privacy protection?

Canadians have never been more reliant on the digital economy than during the pandemic, whether at work, connecting with friends and family, or accessing critical products and services online. What's more, we're relying on the digital economy—fuelled by Canada's data-driven industries—to pull us through a state of economic recovery.

With cybersecurity threats at an all time high, we're losing a



We call on all Parliamentarians to advance Bill C-11 to a committee for further scrutiny and amendments and make its passage a priority before a potential election. Canada's ability to build back in a digital world depends on it, writes John Wiltshire. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

critical window of opportunity to legislate in support of consumers and business. Consumers need modernized protections. The companies fuelling our economic recovery need clear, consistent and modern privacy rules to use data in a privacy-protective way to provide consumers with the products and services they need and want.

Recovering from the pandemic will be one of Canada's greatest tests. So why are we relying on an abacus instead of a calculator to take us through one of our toughest calculations? Especially when the calculator is just within reach.

Parliament must act now to modernize our private-sector privacy law. We have a good piece of legislation in Bill C-11, the Digital Charter Implementation Act. With amendments in a few key areas, the bill can provide a balanced approach to long-overdue updates to private sector privacy law.

The bill will provide consumers with added privacy protections, including new rights to have more meaningful control over their data, and new requirements for companies to be more transparent about their use of personal information—backed by strong penalties and enforcement. It will also help secure a competitive economic position for Canadian businesses in the global digital economy.

All parties agree that consumers and businesses need greater privacy protection and certainty in an evolving digital world. It's time for parliamentarians from all sides of the House to find a solution to advance the bill.

But the bill, which was tabled six months ago, is now languishing in second reading, with no clear path forward for committee review.

Without Bill C-11, a patchwork of privacy rules across different provinces could fill the vacuum, resulting in confusion and complexity for consumers

and businesses alike. It will also threaten our adequacy status with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), hampering our ability to do business with the European Union and the United Kingdom—two of Canada's largest trading partners.

We need a modern legislative framework as we rebuild the post-pandemic economy. A continued legislative logjam or, worse, a potential election delay, will harm consumers and the businesses that serve them.

The stakes could not be higher. We call on all Parliamentarians to advance Bill C-11 to a committee for further scrutiny and amendments and make its passage a priority before a potential election. Canada's ability to build back in a digital world depends on it.

The time to act is now.

John Wiltshire is the president and CEO of the Canadian Marketing Association.

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