



RACHAEL THOMAS
LETHBRIDGE ALBERTA MP

April 16, 2023

The Honourable Anthony Rota, M.P.
Speaker of the House of Commons
Room 233-S, West Block
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I am writing to give you notice that I will rise in the House Monday afternoon to request an emergency debate concerning revelations that the government has pressured social media platforms to edit or remove content it considered embarrassing.

These attempts at what can fairly be described as government censorship of the news and, more generally, the Internet came to public attention through a response to my colleague Dean Allison's Order Paper Question No. 1219, which was tabled just before the Easter adjournment.

One of several examples that have come to light was a 2021 *Toronto Sun* article, written by Lorne Gunter, about pending Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) policy changes. In a column last week, Mr. Gunter noted that IRB officials had first asked his editors to pull his article and when that failed, we now know they asked social media platforms to take it down and prevent any linking to it. The government's requests were denied, thankfully.

As Mr. Gunter observed, about his own experience, the government "still tried to have it banned as misinformation because it was embarrassing to them. It revealed a policy change they didn't want revealed, which is precisely why it had to be revealed and why the social media platforms should not have banned it." I couldn't agree more.

However, such outcomes cannot be relied upon for much longer, given the various bills the government has brought before Parliament to regulate Internet content, such as Bill C-11 and Bill C-18. If adopted, these two bills will greatly diminish the ability of media companies and social media platforms to ignore government commands concerning what information can and cannot be made available to the Canadian public. News and cultural content will be at the mercy of government oversight and approvals. This is a terrifying thought in a longstanding, robust, and proud democracy like Canada.

With these dangerous pieces of legislation nearing the completion of their parliamentary consideration—and especially Bill C-11, which the Liberal-NDP coalition rammed through the



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House with the use of closure on the Thursday night before the Easter adjournment, and now awaits just one final vote in the Senate—it is all the more urgent and pressing for these serious and worrying concerns to be thoroughly and properly debated in Parliament immediately.

I acknowledge that the Chair normally affords a wide latitude for contributions during the Budget debate, and therefore might not normally be inclined to grant an emergency debate at this time. However, I urge you to recognize that these issues touch upon one of our fundamental freedoms: the freedom of speech. Further, news and Internet censorship are decidedly not economic questions, nor could they be addressed through financial initiatives. To suggest that they can simply be raised as incidental thoughts during a discussion about an otherwise reckless budget would be to do a gross disservice to all these concerns.

I appreciate your diligent review of my application and look forward to your favourable ruling.

Yours respectfully,

Rachael Thomas, M.P.
Official Opposition Shadow Minister for Canadian Heritage

