
Tory MP adds to chorus calling for Harper to counter PQ

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OTTAWA — The Globe and Mail

Published Tuesday, Mar. 11 2014, 7:24 PM EDT

Last updated Tuesday, Mar. 11 2014, 11:21 PM EDT

A Conservative MP is part of a group of federalists urging the Harper government to intervene in the Quebec election and actively counter the Parti Québécois' sovereigntist message.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper is deliberately watching the election from the sidelines, wanting to avoid providing any fodder to the separatist camp. But the Special Committee for Canadian Unity is saying that inaction is unacceptable in such an important provincial ballot, which could lead to a third referendum on Quebec sovereignty.

Conservative MP Peter Goldring, who represents the riding of Edmonton East and is part of the SCCU, said the arrival of businessman Pierre Karl Péladeau in the PQ camp on Sunday gave new momentum to the separatist agenda.

“The message from [PQ Leader Pauline Marois] was wishy-washy,” Mr. Goldring said in an interview. “With Mr. Péladeau coming on board, it certainly tilts the pendulum directly towards a referendum.”

Brent Tyler, a lawyer and defender of anglophone rights in Quebec, said the federal government, as well as opposition parties, have to add their voices to the mix. “The hope is that people will think about the issues and vote accordingly, instead of having the federal government sit there like a sphinx on the sidelines,” he said in an interview.

The PQ has called an election for April 7, and is hoping to win a majority to launch a consultative process on Quebec's status in the Canadian federation. Ms. Marois is refusing to lay out her exact strategy, but she has made it clear she will hold a referendum if she feels the Yes side will win.

Mr. Tyler said Ottawa should reiterate the need for a clear question and a clear majority in the event of a third referendum, to remind Quebecers that secession would be a tough slog. “Clarity should be the name of the game here,” he said.

Mr. Tyler would also like for federal government to lay out its plans to challenge the PQ's proposed charter of values, which would prevent provincial workers from wearing overt religious signs on the job. “That bears repeating,” he said.

The Prime Minister's Office has said that it hopes to work with a provincial government that believes in a “strong Quebec within a united Canada,” but the government does not plan to intervene in the election.

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we have no intention of commenting on the election in Quebec. The outcome of the election is for the voters in Quebec to decide,” said Mr. Harper’s spokesman, Jason MacDonald.

The NDP has adopted a position of strict neutrality in the race, while the federal Liberals are openly supporting the Quebec Liberal Party. Still, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau is not planning to campaign in the election.

[On his website](#), Mr. Goldring said he convened the Special Committee for Canadian Unity in 2012, the year the sovereigntist PQ returned to power under the leadership of Pauline Marois.

“We believe that we have entered a new period of peril to national unity,” he said, “that should be seized as an opportunity to challenge a pernicious myth rampant in Quebec that the province can secede unconditionally on the strength of a unilateral referendum vote.”

The special committee is planning to hold a news conference on the matter on March 27 in the parliamentary press theatre.



Conservative MP Peter Goldring is shown in Ottawa on Nov. 21, 2011.
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