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Ottawa Journal ? Questionable Liberal Ethics

By David Tilson, M.P.

On April 5, multiple media outlets reported that Minister of Justice, Jody Wildon-Raybould, was scheduled to attend a $500/ticket fundraiser at Torys LLP offices in Toronto on Thursday, April 7, 2016.

Several of the firm's members were registered to lobby the federal government, including senior partner John Tobin who, since 2010, had been listed as lobbying the Justice department on taxation of mutual funds on behalf of client Invesco Trimark, among others.

The Minister of Justice has exercised poor judgment by putting herself in such a blatant conflict of interest. How are Canadians supposed to trust the decision-making of a government that has such poor judgment?The Minister of Justice has a duty not only to be independent but to be perceived as independent, which the minister has clearly compromised.

On April 19, 2016, the Official Opposition introduced the following motion in the House of Commons for an all-day debate:

?That the House urge the Minister of Justice to:

(a) follow her government's own guidelines for Ministers and Ministers of State as described in ANNEX B OF ?OPEN AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT 2015?, that "Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government?; that ?There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties?; and that ?There should be no singling out, or appearance of singling out, of individuals or organizations as targets of political fundraising because they have official dealings with Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, or their staff or departments?;

(b) apologize for the fundraising event on behalf of the Liberal Party with one of the top law firms in Canada; and

(c) return all funds collected from the event, as was done in 2014 for the event involving the former Minister of Canadian Heritage.?

I made the following comment in the House during that debate:

?Mr. Speaker, one of the principles in the justice system is that justice must be done and must appear to be done, and yet we have a bunch of lawyers getting together and paying $500 to talk to the Justice Minister. Is it possible that some of those lawyers are looking for appointments? They are not supposed to lobby a justice minister or a member of government to become judges, but, in my opinion?and I would like to hear the member's comments on this?it puts the whole justice system into disrepute by saying, ?Okay, lawyers, pay $500, we will give you access to the Justice Minister, tell the Justice Minister how wonderful you are and possibly what a great judge you would make?.

It is essential that Ministers keep their duties as Minister separate from any fundraising they may be involved with as a representative of a political party.

When we were in government, we did the right thing and returned every penny from a fundraiser after the Ethics Commissioner expressed concern.

Although this Prime Minister promised a different kind of government, he has no problem with his Minister of Justice participating in a Liberal Party fundraiser at $500 a plate.

The independence of the Minister of Justice has been compromised and her credibility is diminished. She is headlining a $1,000-per-head fundraiser later this month. Copying the Wynne Liberals, the current government is creating a whole new scheme of paying for access to cabinet ministers. Will the minister stop the excuses and return the pay-to-play cash?

The Liberals are refusing to tell us who attended the event, saying that we have to wait until July to see it on the Elections Canada website.

Why does the Liberal Party want to hide behind the Elections Canada website if they have nothing to hide? If the Liberals really believed their promises on transparency, they would release the list of attendees.

The fact that they haven't speaks volumes.