



AUSTRALIAN SENATE

OCCASIONAL LECTURE SERIES

‘Abolition Difficult, Reform Impossible, Status Quo Unacceptable’: Can Canada Fix its Senate?

Professor Linda Trimble

Main Committee Room, Parliament House

Friday 8 August 12.15pm to 1.15pm

As one of only two appointed upper houses in the western world, the Canadian Senate is an anachronism. Indeed, its architecture has remained largely altered over the course of Canada’s 147-year history. The institution seemed destined to languish in near obscurity until a recent expenses scandal brought its dysfunctions into public view, with ever more sordid details emerging over the past year and a half. Canadians are now so appalled with their upper house most want it dramatically overhauled or abolished.

But Canadian government legislation designed to reform the red chamber was firmly rejected by the courts as unconstitutional. Perceiving diminishing prospects for the Senate’s transformation, the Premier of Saskatchewan tweeted, in exasperation: ‘Abolition difficult, reform impossible, status quo unacceptable’.



In her lecture, Professor Trimble outlines the problems with the Canadian Senate, details the most recent attempt to fix it, and explains why these efforts failed. As she contends, while the status quo is indeed unacceptable, abolition is politically irresponsible, and meaningful reforms are more achievable than many political actors wish to admit. In short, Canada can, and should, fix its Senate.

Linda Trimble is a Professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, where she has been teaching courses on Canadian politics since 1989. She insists on educating her students about the Senate notwithstanding its reputation as an outmoded and largely irrelevant political institution. An award-winning teacher and recent winner of a prize for excellence in mentoring, Dr Trimble’s research explores media coverage of politics and women’s legislative representation.

Admission free—bookings not required

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