

# Protecting Canadians' privacy

## Coalition opposes government surveillance

**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**  
**NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER**

More than 30 Canadian organizations, citizens, experts and businesses — including *Xtra's* publisher, Pink Triangle Press (PTP) — have joined the Protect Our Privacy Coalition to safeguard the privacy of Canadians against the threat of government surveillance of online activities.

"We're a very broad-based and diverse coalition of civil liberty groups, labour groups, small businesses, some right-leaning organizations ... who are coming together to say that Canadians need strong, transparent and enforceable privacy safeguards," says David Christopher, communications coordinator at OpenMedia.ca, which is coordinating the coalition, launched Oct 10.

All of the members have signed on to a statement that reads, "More than ever, Canadians need strong, genuinely transparent, and properly enforced safeguards to secure privacy rights. We call on Government to put in place effective legal measures to protect the privacy of every resident of Canada against intrusion by government entities."

"Obviously, this is being launched in the context in which we have the story about Canada spying on Brazil that will really shock Canadians," Christopher says, referring to allegations that a Canadian security agency partnered with its American counterpart to spy on Brazil's mines and energy ministry.

The coalition also launched amidst worries that Justice Minister Peter MacKay may reintroduce contentious aspects of Bill C-30, which would have required internet service providers to give police access to online communication without a warrant. The bill was withdrawn following widespread public outcry.

Christopher says MacKay may still implement those provisions through a joint federal-provincial-territorial report on cyberbullying released in July that, among other things, calls on the government to ensure police have the legal authority to access emails and text messages under the false messages, indecent phone calls and harassing phone calls provisions of



David Christopher says the government's potential reintroduction of "lawful access" measures is cause for concern. COURTESY OF DAVID CHRISTOPHER

the Criminal Code.


Micheal Vonn, policy director at the BC Civil Liberties Association, thinks the provisions are being introduced by stealth in "feel-good" laws.

"This is a reverse omnibus bill where a big program to conduct surveillance is smashed up into a hundred different pieces and you have to look for them in different pieces of legislation that the government will be bringing forward," she says.

"We support the Protect Our Privacy Coalition in the hope that it will impede the government's assault on the Charter of Rights and its creeping theft of our freedom to say what we think without fear of reprisal," says PTP president and executive director Ken Popert.

Popert is especially concerned about the potential implications of online state surveillance on gay and lesbian people.

"The deeper issue here is that the whole politics of equality do not address the content of our sexual and emotional lives, and those are the things that remain vulnerable to surveillance abuse," he says.

 To read the full story, go to [dailyxtra.com](http://dailyxtra.com) or visit [stopspying.ca](http://stopspying.ca).

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