

Martha Hall Findlay Blog, January 2010

Prorogation

I am an elected Member of Parliament, but Stephen Harper is trying to prevent me from doing my job. It should NOT be his choice.

The people of Willowdale did not elect me as their Member of Parliament so that I could stay home.

My message to Stephen Harper: I'm going to do MY job, despite his best efforts to prevent me from doing it. LIBERALS ARE WORKING.

This is not Stephen Harper's government. It is OUR government, government for ALL Canadians, as represented by their Members of Parliament in the House of Commons. Canada is NOT Stephen Harper's personal fiefdom to control as he wishes--no matter how much he would like that control.

And let's be clear---this has nothing to do with the Olympics, or "working on the budget". Pure and simple, Stephen Harper is running away. He's running from some very tough questions. Questions that we were asking about:

1. real job numbers, not just what Stephen Harper "promised"; details on results of the "stimulus" plan that Stephen Harper was refusing to provide;
2. why Stephen Harper has repeatedly fired some civil servants for disagreeing with him and eliminated funding to others who have been critical of his government (including, incidentally, the elimination of funding to those whose offices were actually created by Stephen Harper); and

3. Stephen Harpers' refusal to disclose information about the Afghan detainees and torture.

Stephen Harper has been refusing to answer any of these questions. He is abusing parliamentary procedure by proroguing to 'cut and run'.

My question to Stephen Harper, and the question all Canadians should be asking him, is WHAT IS HE TRYING TO HIDE?

For the second time in only a year, Stephen Harper has prorogued Parliament. For the second time in only a year, his only reason for doing so has been to run away from controversy---and Stephen Harper is hoping that Canadians won't notice. We can't let that happen: I call on all Willowdaleans--indeed all Canadians--to say "No".

The first time Harper prorogued Parliament, only a year ago, was to avoid a vote of non-confidence. A majority of MPs in the House of Commons had made this loss of confidence in him known; we were about to vote (that IS our responsibility). But Stephen Harper prorogued Parliament, preventing our vote and effectively running away to save his own skin.

This time, Stephen Harper is running away from the questions and inquiries about torture in Afghanistan. Why? Because the more we questioned, the more evidence there was that the Harper government has been covering up the truth, and the more the government blocked access to information. What were they hiding? To get at the truth, a majority of the House of Commons passed a motion demanding the production of documents, which the government kept denying access to, relating to the alleged torture of Afghan detainees (a very serious issue, a breach of international law). Harper's reaction? To openly flaunt the will of Parliament---"If you really want the documents, then sue us" was the reaction.

Parliament spoke, with the voice of a majority of MPs, representing a majority of Canadians. We should NOT have to sue the government to compel it to comply with the will of Parliament. And Stephen Harper should not be allowed to close down Parliament when it suits his purposes. It is not HIS government---it is the government of Canadians.

MY JOB AS THE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR WILLOWDALE:

The people of Willowdale elected me as their MP to represent them, and their interests, in the House of Commons---in the debates over pending legislation, in the votes, and in the committee work that we do (in my case, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates and the Standing Committee on Finance).

My job in Opposition is NOT just to "oppose"--my job is to help ensure that this country is governed according to the democratic principles that are fundamental to our society. Principles that Stephen Harper is pulling apart, to suit his own purposes.

I want to stress that I represent ALL of the people in Willowdale, regardless of whether they actually voted for me or for someone else. THAT's democracy. But we ARE in a minority government, and Mr. Harper keeps forgetting that. A large majority of people in Willowdale did NOT vote Conservative; a majority of Canadians across the country did NOT vote Conservative. By doing so, Canadians were asking us, as Opposition MPs, to help keep this government to account---to ensure honesty, transparency, accountability and fair play.

Stephen Harper campaigned on these principles, but he is now doing everything he can to take them away. He is preventing us from fulfilling our responsibilities to Canadians.