

Get the inside **Scoop** on federal politics **THE HILLTIMES** Start your free trial subscription today.

HTwork.ca
Classifieds
Vacations

# THE HILLTIMESonline

Archives  Search

News Policy Briefings Features Ideas Life The Q&A Exclusive Lists & Surveys Editorial Columns Newsroom Blog Calendar  
 Legislation Lobbying Politics Backrooms Climbers Civil Circles HOH Party Central Korski Cops Wiseman Stanbury Wiseguys Spin

## Parliament could shut down early, fall election likely

**Conservatives can't wait to 'get out of here and change the channel.'**

By TIM NAUMETZ

Published June 7, 2010 8 Comments

- View story
- Email
- Comments
- To the Editor



**Inside Politics**  
 James Travers  
 Mulroney's grubby business dealings intersect with PM's search for new GG

Government and opposition MPs are targeting an early adjournment for Parliament's summer recess, with a leading pollster and one of the most politically savvy NDP MPs saying a fall election call is likely, possibly before the scheduled return in September.



If all goes as planned, and the government and Liberals are able to overcome NDP delaying tactics on the budget implementation bill in the House, Parliament could adjourn as early as June 18, rather than its scheduled recess the following week. Signs were abundant last week that an early departure for the summer BBQ circuit was in the works, with four committees holding in-camera sessions to complete reports on a range of bills and the House several times sitting beyond the normal evening adjournment time.

But after nearly three months of wrangling over the controversy of former Conservative MP Rahim Jaffer's unregistered lobbying and contacts with Cabinet ministers to allegedly get money from the government's \$1-billion green fund, other confrontations over government interference with Access to Information Act document requests and pitched battles over the treatment of combat detainees in Afghanistan, New Democrat MP Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, Man.) said he believes the next clash will be on the hustings.

"I think the Conservatives can't wait to get out

**THE HILLTIMES**  
 POLICY BRIEFINGS

DOWNLOAD TODAY'S PAPER

The Politically Savvy and Sexy Survey

The 100 Top Lobbysts

of here and change the channel and I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts we never come back," Mr. Martin told *The Hill Times*. "Sometime late in the summer or early in the fall, Harper will meet the governor general and say he's lost the ability to govern and we should go to the people."

Prime Minister Harper could be building his argument now, preparing to make the case, as he did prior to the 2008 October election, that his government faces a dysfunctional Parliament. His plea for a dissolution of

Parliament by the Governor General would be based on the bitter battles that are taking place in two key Commons committees over ministerial accountability and a confrontation that has begun over whether Cabinet documents as well as Defence Department and Foreign Affairs emails should be subject to review by opposition MPs in the confrontation over detainee transfers and possible torture in Afghanistan.

Mr. Martin and Ottawa pollster Nik Nanos both say Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, Alta.) would want to build as much momentum as possible after the world spotlight he and Canada will be under for the G8 and G20 summits beginning June 25—although Mr. Nanos said controversy over the mushrooming cost of those meetings could be a drawback for the Conservatives—and the fact that Canada suffered least among its trading partners from the economic downturn and fiscal crisis of the past year-and-a-half.

"That would be their first choice, because running a campaign on the economy by default aligns with the core Conservative brand, which is usually stronger than the Liberals on the fiscal issues," said Mr. Nanos. "The other thing that the Conservatives have in their favour is that it's pretty clear that the narrative in the public domain is that Canada has done better through the economic downturn basically than all of our other trading partners. We know that pocketbook issues drive people's behaviour."

"I think there's a very high likelihood of there being an election before the next budget," added Mr. Nanos. "And I think the Conservatives are going to want to time the election in synch with continued positive economic news, so I think there's a pretty high likelihood of a fall election, but that's in terms of what the Conservatives want."

Mr. Martin agreed a ballot-box question on the economy would be Mr. Harper's No. 1 preference. He said the government would obviously want to avoid a campaign battle over recent controversies that have boiled over in Parliament. They include allegations of unregistered lobbying and the use of government services and cabinet contacts by Mr. Jaffer, his wife Helena Guergis's (Simcoe-Grey, Ont.) dismissal from Cabinet over unknown, but apparently related actions, and the government's insistence that Cabinet ministers, not political staff, must appear to testify at committees over the Jaffer allegations and a controversy over political interference with documents that the Public Works Department intended to release under the Access to Information Act.

"I think Harper would love to run on the economy as opposed to scandal, the culture of secrecy or the irritants that are hounding and plaguing this session of Parliament," said Mr. Martin. "You know, have a nice cooling-off period over the summer, go to the people with some kind of a track record of economic security and stability and roll the dice there. If he lets it go on any longer, it can't get any better for them. They're taking some pretty serious body blows in terms of their accountability and transparency record."

Certainly, the kind of heated exchanges that took place last week in the Government Operations committee inquiry into Mr. Jaffer's lobbying activities might not be favourable for Mr. Harper before an election. The confrontation over whether three Cabinet ministers could appear as witnesses instead of political staff peaked as Transport Minister John Baird (Ottawa West Nepean, Ont.) appeared to lose the characteristic self-control he displays in Question



Period and loudly and repeatedly yelled, "Point of order, point of order!" as he attempted to wrest control of the meeting from committee chair and Liberal MP Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Ont.).

When Mr. Baird turned his attention to Liberal MP Sibhoan Coady (St. John's South-Mount Pearl, Nfld.) the determined Newfoundlander refused to back down.

"You are trying to intimidate not just the chair, but this entire committee," Ms. Coady shot back at Mr. Baird after he sniped at her relative inexperience in Parliament.

"I've been in business for a very long time, been on lots of boards of directors, this is ridiculous," Ms. Coady continued, reiterating her insistence the committee had the right to later call ministerial staff even if it agreed to hear from Mr. Baird, Science Minister Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, Ont.) and Natural Resources Minister Christian Paradis (Mégantic-L'Érable, Que.) during the stormy meeting.

"The chair was ruling on that and then it disintegrated into this muck. Are you trying to intimidate me Mr. Baird? Because I will put myself up against you any day on intimidation factors. Don't try and intimidate me, ever."

*news@hilltimes.com*

*The Hill Times*



---

## Make a Comment

Posting your comment as:

Comment:

DISCLAIMER: The Hill Times will not tolerate abusive comments which are inflammatory, racist, sexist, etc. Comments are moderated and The Hill Times reserves the right not to publish comments.

[Submit Comment](#)



### **CAPC**

Canadian Political Canadian Consultant  
[www.rothschildconsulting.ca](http://www.rothschildconsulting.ca)

### **The Democracy Law Blog**

A legal blog providing information and analysis on democracy in Canada  
[www.democracylawblog.ca](http://www.democracylawblog.ca)

### **Andy Stern**

The Devil at My Doorstep SEIU Forced