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Kelly McParland: More cranky days ahead for Michael Ignatieff
Posted: January 26, 2009, 10:29 AM by Kelly McParland

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Michael Ignatieff never comes off as a jolly, back-slapping sort of fellow, and he kept up the cranky routine in a pre-budget address to the Canadian Club.

The Liberal leader was steamed that the Prime Minister had allowed key details of Tuesday's budget to leak -- if you can call flying around the country making staged announcements a "leak".

"I asked Mr. Harper not to play games like that," he complained after the Tories revealed the size of the anticipated deficit. "I wanted him to put the facts and figures on the table, not let them slip out at his convenience. I think he just can't help himself. He thinks it is all just some kind of game."

"The release of this budget information is irresponsible and potentially costly to the economy," he added, without explaining either charge.

If Mr. Harper is playing games, he learned some of them from Paul Martin, who pioneered the practice of pre-announcing budget details. By the end of his years as Finance Minister and then Prime Minister, the drama that once surrounded budgets had disappeared; there was hardly an item of interest that hadn't already been carefully fed to chosen members of the Ottawa press pack.

It worked well, so you can't blame Jim Flaherty, the current finance minister, for adopting it. But one suspects it isn't really the tradition-breaking nature of the leaks that bother Mr. Ignatieff. More likely what really riles him is the steady erosion of potential targets for him to attack Tuesday once the document has been unveiled. That's understandable -- the Tories appear to have been careful to meet all the criteria put forward by the leader of the opposition as necessary to win his support. So what's he going to do Tuesday, stand around telling reporters: "Gee, that Flaherty -- Can he give a budget or what?"

The Liberals had demanded support for the unemployed, support for the poor, targeted investment to create jobs, and assurances there would be a way out of deficit spending when the economy improves. B.C. and Quebec demanded money for forestry. Ontario wants help for the auto industry and a show of concern for its manufacturing woes. There has been general agreement that the unemployment program needs reform, with particular attention to retraining.



And the Tory response? The Ontario auto industry has been taken care of with a \$4 billion bailout offer, even though polls suggest Canadians are less than enthused about such things. ("There is very little support in the country for industry bailout programs," according to a [Nanos Research](#)

poll.). [According to Tory leaks and announcements](#) there will also be money for the forestry industry; \$1.5 billion for retraining; \$2 billion for public housing, including \$600 million for aboriginal housing; support for hard-hit communities; money for farmers; a new economic development agency for southern Ontario, ditto for the North; \$300 million for the tourism industry, \$160 million for culture (three times the paltry cuts that cost the government so many votes in Quebec in October) and some tax cuts for the middle class.

Farmers, forestry, underprivileged, auto industry, Ontario, Quebec, aboriginals ... did we miss anyone? Nobody is getting everything they wanted, which would be impossible. And Mr. Flaherty still has to explain how he'll eventually end the deficits without bringing down the Wrath of Khan on his head. But all the major players are getting something valuable enough that they'd be loathe to see it threatened, and certainly not pleased if Mr. Ignatieff -- who has yet to make any specific proposals of his own -- seriously suggests triggering an election instead. If you want to launch a serious attack on this budget it would best be from the right, where Conservatives have to wonder when the Liberal party converted Flaherty to their side.

Which is why this isn't working out the way the Liberal leader might have preferred. . Sure he'll be able to grouch about various details, and boast about having forced Mr. Harper to get serious after that embarrassing economic update in November. But claiming to have influenced the Prime Minister isn't the best route to becoming Prime Minister. One suspects Mr. Ignatieff will have some more cranky days ahead of him.

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by Leaf124
Jan 26 2009
10:45 AM

Oh no, informing the people of the budget, how irresponsible!

by spaceknife
Jan 26 2009
12:10 PM

Michael Ignatieff which has been pushed and celebrated by the press as the new PET is, as far as I am concerned an Hypocrit who did everything he could by proxy to undermine Stephane Dion' leadership. It is the same Paul Martin's gang that torpedoed Jean Chretien that did the dirty underground work that brought him to lead the liberals.

Wasnt he a supporter of the Irak war in another life before he was against.

What a choice we have for the next election. I didnt use to be a separatist but I am seriously thinking about it when I see the way the reputation of Canada is going these days.

by
freedomwriter
Jan 26 2009
12:11 PM

"I asked Mr. Harper not to play games like that"...I wanted him to put the facts and figures on the table" When did Ignatieff become Harper's boss?!

by Barneyrubble
Seems like pretty harmless spending to me.

Jan 26 2009
12:35 PM

The whole idea is to keep the economy moving and surviving. It is the same thing as keeping a sail boat going until the wind comes up again. Isn't it?

If you are putting money into peoples' pockets and economics. Of course, they don't agree on much else.

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28/01/09: National Post columnist Lorne Gunter and The [Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives'](#) David Macdonald actually agree on something: The 2009 federal budget has more to do with PR than

the industries are kept going then what is the harm in the whole thing? Nothing I say. And, besides, you can always stop the hemorrhaging if the economy picks up steam again. Think about the results if you do not do the spending required to keep up the hopes and spirits of honest, hard working Canadians and the companies that feed them.

Think about lucky we are to have a 'supposedly' sound banking system. Just think if someone of Stephen Harper's mentality allowed the banks to merge and be like their U.S. counterparts. Just think long and hard about something like that. If we were likewise exposed to the financial engineers on Wall street (and their political accomplices) we would not even be sailing our little boat anymore. The mast would be broken in half or there would be gaping holes in the side of our vessel and the water would be rushing in, and no amount of external support could help us out.

Be thankful that the political gods are protecting us-for now.

Yeah, well Mike you can always invoke the coalition threat and defeat the government and then get whipped in the next election and Steve won't have to put up with you any more. And then the party will have 4 years to find a new leader.

So whine and snivel all you want but send a couple of dozen home on the lack of confidence vote and live to fight another day. meanwhile your honeymoon with the electorate will wind down.

Yes and if someone thinks Mike is Steve's boss-- just remember Jack Layton is Mikes boss, and Duceppe is the ultimate boss.

From the Calgary Herald.

While former finance minister Paul Martin once called traditional budget secrecy "an archaic notion," the orchestrated release of a key financial detail went beyond the traditional leaks, and was widely viewed as an exercise in spin control by the Harper Conservatives to deflect attention from the fact Canada will re-enter the era of deficits.

I would like someone to tell me a country that will not go into deficit to try and ride out this economic storm. Get real folks a deficit is a necessary evil in these trying times.

Ignatieff never bothered to explain why he thought these leaks were irresponsible or "potentially damaging" to the economy.

I would like to know on what grounds Mr. Ignatieff bases his complaining.

Whether the releases are "spin control" or merely doing what Paul Martin made a habit of doing, where's the harm?

What a great joy to see our brilliant, young, and decisive Prime Minister beat the Liberals,CCF/NDP and the Bloc at their own game.

No worries here about the "Coalition of Evil" ever

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–spaceknife

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going forward. The Liberals, Socialist CCF/NDP, & the Socialist Bloc can all hang their heads in shame along with former 10 year Vice-President of "Socialist International" Ed Broadbent, and former Socialist Premier Allan Blakeny of Saskatchewan.

[Been there, done that. Its not about the children, its about the legal "profession" keeping the conflict going until all parties are impoverished and the children so...](#)

–rossbcan

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I now look forward to the day "in a few years" of dealing with the question of the "Two Dollar Politicians" that we have been burdened with from taxpayers dollars. A perk, quietly and "generally unknown" to exist, by the taxpayers, that was put in place by former Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

[@Barneyrubble, Your name was mentioned in my last post in error. Your comments are fair. Please disregard.](#)

–chuck80

[Full Comment](#)

by Cthrew
Jan 26 2009
1:39 PM

With all due respect, Kelly, you didn't quote Iggy correctly. He called the Prime Minister of Canada "the guy." Shortly after Ignatieff shoved his bony finger into a camera and warned Harper not to disparage him, he and his spineless minions began lobbing one patronizing personal attack after the other against Harper, culminating last Friday when Ignatieff referred to Harper as "the guy."

[Ok, KJOPC, Barney Rubble and Fogey, etc, let's look at the facts. CB, rightly or wrongly, was found guilty of some of the charges brought against him. He was sentenced...](#)

–chuck80

[Full Comment](#)

Not only is this an insult to Harper, but to the office of the PM. Of course, after being a passport Canadian for so long, perhaps Mister silver spoon in the mouth forgot that our elected leader deserves to be treated with diplomacy. Please see Iggy's quote below:

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by iamtom
Jan 26 2009
1:46 PM

A lame response to Tory attacks back in the day of then Finance Minister Ralph Goodale leaking information on income trusts and dividend taxes?

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–Paul Russell

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by Grey County
Jan 26 2009
1:50 PM

When our jolly backslapping prime minister leaks bad news ahead of the budget announcement, he is preparing the public to assume their usual lethargic acceptance. They may even confuse the size of the deficit with the stimulus effort and not notice that Flaherty's management has already created a deficit.

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Then there is the effect that bad news has upon the markets.

My concern is that while the budget may appear to address every sector, there will be a stalling and delay tactics and reversals so that some areas will never see the money. Also Harper tends to push out the old Trojan horse: the budget will have a hidden agenda within as it did when he made changes to immigration policy.

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by ShayGaetz
Jan 26 2009
2:00 PM

Weardown 1:25 PM - emphasis on the word: "EVIL"

Modern day FDR-style "New Deal" economics will prove disasterous!

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FTR - FDR's "New Deal" exacerbated and prolonged the Great Depression!

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by fish77
Jan 26 2009
2:10 PM

If Madam Jean lets the devil's triangle become a reality if the government falls then she should be fired. We did not vote for a coalition. Also why does a provincial party have a say in leadership debates and why should all of Canadian taxpayers support them financially. They do not post any candidates outside Quebec do they?

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by Western View
Jan 26 2009
2:26 PM

Kelly, the November budget update was not embarrassing for Harper. It was a downright failure of leadership and an abject boondoggle of the economic crisis that we knew was here early last November. Harper and Flaherty had their heads in the sand and had quite the 'doofus' moment together. Harper then having to go and prorogue parliament was embarrassing.

Hopefully on take 2 they can regain some confidence - there's nothing worse than having low approval numbers as a nation leader.

We'll see what happens this week.

by Western View
Jan 26 2009
2:27 PM

"Coalition of Evil" and "devil's triangle". Are you folks for real? Is Carl Rove speaking to you all at night? Let's calm down the angry and hateful rhetoric.

This country deserves better.

by akb66
Jan 26 2009
2:55 PM

Western View, Harper and Flaherty had their heads in someplace altogether different than sand.

We need somebody that can actually lead, not just snip at the opposition, from either side.

by manyoars
Jan 26 2009
3:40 PM

Right-wing talking point alert!

ShayGaetz sez:

"FDR's "New Deal" exacerbated and prolonged the Great Depression!"

FALSE.

Read Paul Krugman's recent NYT column "Bad Faith Economics" for a debunking of the right's current spin cycle, as well as his Nov. column "Franklin Delano Obama" on the New Deal and some of FDR's mistakes.

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