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# Harper's throne speech has exposed Dion's weakness

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Clever as ever, the prime minister is rephrasing the big political question: Once about Stephen Harper and trust, it's now about St phane Dion and competence.

A beleaguered Liberal leader only made it easier to answer yesterday by choosing temporary self-preservation instead of a risky election fought on principles. His tortured reluctance to topple the Conservative minority over a throne speech crafted to offend his sensibilities buys time. But it does little to inspire confidence in Dion's fitness to lead or repair the fissures in a party that once prided itself on being the Western world's most successful.

Much as he did in bungling Quebec byelections, Dion allowed Liberals to be boxed-in by the throne speech. As the prime minister made clear yesterday, Conservatives will spend the coming weeks nailing down the lid, beginning with a confidence vote on omnibus crime legislation.

Liberals helped make their current mess possible. In overlooking more accomplished candidates in choosing a leader with suspect strategic skills and weak caucus support, convention delegates set in motion the events now unfolding here.

All of this makes capital theatre even if elsewhere the brinksmanship is watched, if at all, with disbelief. But what's largely missed in witnessing Harper play politics so adroitly —doubters need only consider the artful pre-throne speech orchestration of an unusual news conference, an equalization deal with Nova Scotia and the appointment of John Manley's Afghanistan panel — is how much this prime minister is changing the Canadian brand.

In 4,000 words and 40 minutes Tuesday night Harper described a country many of its citizens would struggle to recognize — a Canada that breaks its international treaty commitment to fight climate change, fuels unfounded fears to advance a law-and-order agenda and effectively commits to extending a polarizing Afghanistan mission months before Parliament will consider the options.

Subtler if equally worthy of citizen attention is what the prime minister has in mind for the federation. With a policy mix reflecting his concerns for provincial rights and market efficiency Harper is simultaneously proposing to loosen and tighten central control.

Generally appealing to Conservatives and an affront to Liberals, Harper's recreation of Canada more in the image of its North American neighbour than its traditional European soulmates demands thorough and thoughtful deconstruction. Normally that work would mostly fall to the Official Opposition, either on Parliament Hill or in an election. But these times are far from normal.

A suspect leader and a party so unprepared for a campaign that it genuflects to calculated humiliations is poorly positioned to expose the fault lines in government policies or proselytize credible alternatives.

James Travers covers national issues.

# Dion mocked as he backs down; Tories laugh at Liberal leader as he announces he won't force election

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**ILLUSTRATION:** Photo: THE CANADIAN PRESS / Liberal Leader Stephane Dion isapplauded by deputy leader Michael Ignatieff and other caucus members during his response to the throne speech in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa yesterday. ;

**DATELINE:** OTTAWA

**SOURCE:** The Canadian Press

**COPYRIGHT:** © 2007 Torstar Corporation

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They call laughter the kiss of death in politics — and the smooches rained down upon Stephane Dion from the Conservative benches yesterday.

By the time he finished a 45-minute speech in which he declared he would not bring down the government, the Liberal leader was deluged with derisive guffaws.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper joined in as his troops sniggered openly at Dion. The laughter first erupted when Dion declared that the Liberal party was tough on crime.

The mockery grew louder as Dion launched into a lengthy defence of his record on climate change while lambasting the Tories' abandonment of the Kyoto accord.

Dion persisted without acknowledging his opponents, who by this time were gobsmacked by a case of the mass giggles. It was so widespread at one point that even Michael Ignatieff — the Liberal deputy leader who sits next to Dion — cupped his face to stifle a laugh.

But Dion plodded ahead.

He did it in English that was sometimes stilted enough to prompt barbed heckles from his opponents.

Dion drew the loudest laughs as he read news releases from environmental groups accusing the Tories of cancelling Liberal programs and replacing them with inferior ones.

"And I quote the Sierra Club," Dion began. "Federal programs were slashed and the importance of climate change was downplayed. An entire year was lost. End of quote."

Elizabeth May, the Green party leader, nodded her head in silent agreement from the visitors' gallery.

However, amid the chortles from the Tory benches, yesterday may have brought a silver lining. After weeks in which the Liberals were embroiled in infighting, there were signs that the Liberals had reached

Dion mocked as he backs down; Tories laugh at Liberal leader as he announces he won't force election

rock-bottom and were looking to patch up differences.

Grit MPs have spent weeks openly questioning their leader, leaking accounts of private meetings to the media and calling for the resignation of a key member of Dion's inner circle.

Hostilities degenerated into a vulgarity-laced exchange between a pair of Liberal MPs at a caucus meeting earlier this week.

But there was none of that yesterday.

Two of the Montreal MPs who called publicly for the resignation of Dion confidant Jamie Carroll went out of their way to offer a public display of affection for their leader.

In one of several standing ovations for his leader, Denis Coderre finished clapping, sat down, and stood up to resume cheering.

Another Montreal MP, Pablo Rodriguez, was one of many Liberals to crowd around Dion and shake his hand at the end of his speech.

The cheers for Dion grew louder as he bashed one element of the throne speech after another, accusing the Tories of ignoring child poverty, the environment, Canada's economic competitiveness, and of misleading Canadians on Afghanistan.

But the more Dion attacked them, the more the Tories heckled.

Perhaps the loudest cheer from Liberals came when Dion made what may have been among the meekest predictions in Canadian politics: that he would keep the Conservatives from winning a majority government.

Leaning back in his chair, Harper turned and waved dismissively.

Dion mocked as he backs down; Tories laugh at Liberal leader as he announces he won't force election

# NO FALL VOTE; Skittish Liberals plan to abstain from voting on throne speech

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A weakened Stephane Dion pulled the country back from the brink of a fall election yesterday, only to have Stephen Harper push him toward another political precipice.

The Liberal leader told the House of Commons that he won't bring down Harper's minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

Instead, he introduced a lengthy amendment -- carefully worded to ensure that neither the Bloc Qu b cois nor the NDP will support it. Should the amendment fail, Dion said Liberals will abstain from voting on the main throne speech motion next week, thus assuring the government's survival.

It appeared to be exactly what the prime minister wanted to hear.

Harper immediately pressed home his advantage, declaring that his first act in the new parliamentary session will be to introduce a sweeping justice bill.

He said he'll allow no substantive opposition amendments to the bill and he'll make it a confidence matter, meaning the government will fall if all three opposition parties vote against it.

The Tackling Violent Crime Act will include elements of several pieces of legislation that didn't pass in the last session, including provisions on violent gun crimes, the age of sexual consent, impaired driving, bail rules and dangerous offenders.

Dion spent almost 45 minutes lambasting the throne speech before finally conceding the Liberals won't defeat the government over it.

He accused the Tories of abandoning the Kyoto climate-change protocol, being unclear on the Afghan mission, and ignoring the needs of the poor. But he also noted that Canadians don't want another election now.

"The official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech," he said.

"We will propose amendments, and we will not make this government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years -- something Canadians have clearly shown that they do not

want."

NDP Leader Jack Layton and BQ Leader Gilles Duceppe reiterated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Layton blasted Dion for failing to stand up for his principles and tried to goad him into voting against the throne speech. "That's what the NDP will be doing, showing leadership."

Harper openly mocked Dion's face-saving position, taken in the midst of internal party chaos and rising doubts about his leadership.

"I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with but then passes you anyway," Harper said.

The Liberal amendment calls on the government to accept the blame for failing to meet Kyoto targets, suggesting that the previous Liberal government was on track to do so. Both Layton and Duceppe scoffed at that assertion.

The amendment also calls on the government to inform NATO that Canada will end its combat mission in Kandahar on schedule in February 2009. It does not call for a full military pullout from Afghanistan.

Liberal sources said the amendment is a face-saving measure designed to give voice to the party's objections to the throne speech while ensuring that the government doesn't fall.

Dion had to be talked into the gambit. Sources said he was initially among the strongest hawks in caucus, wanting to force an election rather than risk hurting his reputation as a champion of the environment by supporting Harper's anti-Kyoto message.

However, he came under heavy pressure from many of his MPs who fear going into an election while the party is disorganized, weak in Quebec, stagnant in the polls and low on funds.

# Liberals won't force election; Stéphane Dion won't bring down Tories over throne speech, but another showdown looms

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The Liberal leader told the House of Commons that he won't bring down Harper's minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

Instead, he said he will introduce amendments, and abstain from voting against the main throne speech motion next week.

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Dion accused the Conservatives of abandoning the Kyoto climate-change protocol, being unclear on the Afghan mission, and ignoring the needs of the poor. But he also noted that Canadians don't want another election now.

"The Official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech," he said.

"We will propose amendments, and we will not make this government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years — something Canadians have clearly shown that they do not want."

Harper said his government will consider passage of the throne speech as an endorsement of its agenda.

"The Opposition can't allow it to pass, and then expect to obstruct our core priorities," he said.

Liberals won't force election; Stéphane Dion won't bring down Tories over throne speech, but another showdown

The Liberal amendments chastise the Tories for abandoning Kyoto and call on the government to inform NATO that Canada will end its combat mission in Kandahar on schedule in February 2009. They do not call for a full military pullout from Afghanistan.

Liberal sources said the amendments are a face-saving measure designed to ensure that the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois won't support them when they come to a vote next week. If all goes according to plan, the amendments will fail and Liberal MPs will then abstain on the main motion.

The Liberal sources said Dion wanted to force an election, fearing his reputation as a champion of the environment and progress he's made wooing Green and left-wing voters will be seriously hurt if Liberals don't vote against Harper's anti-Kyoto message.

However, he came under heavy pressure from many of his MPs who worry about going into an election while party is disorganized, weak in Quebec, stagnant in the polls, and low on funds.

Insiders say internal party polls paint a much more dismal picture for the Liberals than public opinion polls, including the prospect of being reduced to as little as two seats in Quebec.

Also, the latest quarterly fundraising figures are expected to be released shortly, showing the Liberals falling even further behind the Tories in building a campaign war chest.

To add to the woes, Dion lost both his Quebec lieutenant and the director general of the party's Quebec wing Tuesday — just hours before the throne speech. Dion dipped into Liberal ranks in the Senate to fill one vacancy but was still scrambling to find a replacement for the other.

The disarray comes in the wake of the Liberals' humiliating defeat in three Quebec byelections last month, including the loss of the party's longtime Montreal fortress of Outremont.

It's not all smooth sailing for Harper either — he is still well short of majority territory in public opinion polls and he trails the Liberals in vote-rich Ontario.

Liberals won't force election; Stéphane Dion won't bring down Tories over throne speech, but another show

# Letter | Who is behind troops?

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I was shocked when I read a local committee was urging citizens to remove their yellow ribbons because the group believes they are a symbol of supporting war.

I see their message has changed to simply, bring the troops home.

Isn't it great people have the freedom to say what they think? Canadian soldiers have fought and died to preserve our freedom. Canadian soldiers train every day to fight for freedom here and abroad.

The Canadian Armed Forces did not put their hands up and say, "We'll take Khandahar," the most dangerous place in Afghanistan.

Khandahar was what was left.

Other NATO countries agreed much more quickly to support the Afghan war and their soldiers were placed in safer areas of the country.

Our government of the day worried more about backlash from Canadians who oppose war than about making good military decisions.

It's ironic that those who oppose what our troops do are the reason they are in the most dangerous part of Afghanistan, suffering more casualties than any other country.

I was brought up in a military family, and I have a message for those who don't support our troops: if you don't want to stand behind our troops, stand in front of them.

Our soldiers went to war with borrowed uniforms and borrowed equipment. They now have the very best of uniforms and equipment.

Recently an opposition MP, who supported borrowing uniforms and equipment for our troops, and suggested we borrow tanks, not buy them, when we need them, ventured to Khandahar.

I wonder if a battle breaks out if this MP will be in front of our troops or behind them?

Brian Hancox Saint John, N.B.

# Prime minister to keep confidence votes coming

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A weakened Stephane Dion pulled the country back from the brink of a fall election Wednesday, only to have Stephen Harper push him toward another political precipice.

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Dion accused the Conservatives of abandoning the Kyoto climate-change protocol, being unclear on the Afghan mission, and ignoring the needs of the poor. But he also noted that Canadians don't want another election now.

"The Official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech," he said.

"We will propose amendments, and we will not make this government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years — something Canadians have clearly shown that they do not want."

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for a full military pullout from Afghanistan.

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However, he came under heavy pressure from many of his MPs who worry about going into an election while party is disorganized, weak in Quebec, stagnant in the polls, and low on funds.

Insiders say internal party polls paint a much more dismal picture for the Liberals than public opinion polls, including the prospect of being reduced to as little as two seats in Quebec.

Also, the latest quarterly fundraising figures are expected to be released shortly, showing the Liberals falling even further behind the Tories in building a campaign war chest.

# 'Fragging' rare in Iraq, Afghanistan; Only one soldier has been charged with killing his commander during the wars

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**PHOTO:** AP

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**ILLUSTRATION:** American troops killed so many of their commanding officers in Vietnam that it became known as fragging. There has only been one incident during the Iraq and Afghan wars, probably because the army is a volunteer army, experts say. U.S. soldiers stand guard after a car bomb exploded in northwestern Baghdad, Iraq, on Sunday.

**WORD COUNT:** 596

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American troops killed their own commanders so often during the Vietnam War that the crime earned its own name – "fragging."

But since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military has charged only one soldier with killing his commanding officer, a dramatic turnabout that most experts attribute to the all–volunteer military.

And some argue the case of Staff Sgt. Alberto Martinez shouldn't even be considered fragging, since his motive was unclear.

Fragging, derived from the hard-to-trace weapon of choice in such attacks, the fragmentation grenade, has varying definitions, from the killing of any superior to the murder of a soldier's direct commander to avoid combat.

Martinez, 40, of Troy, N.Y., and a member of the state's Army National Guard, is scheduled to appear today in a courtroom at Fort Bragg, where the army's version of a grand jury is hearing evidence in his murder case.

He faces a possible death sentence if convicted of setting off several grenades and a mine in one of Saddam Hussein's former palaces near Tikrit, Iraq.

The June 2005 blast, initially blamed on a mortar round, killed Martinez's company commander, Capt. Phillip Esposito, 30, of Suffern, N.Y., and 1st Lt. Louis Allen, 34, of Milford, Pa., the unit's operations officer.

At a hearing in Kuwait early in the case, a witness testified Martinez had said twice that he disliked Esposito and was going to "frag" him.

Between 1969 and 1971, the army reported 600 fragging incidents that killed 82 Americans and injured 651. In 1971 alone, there were 1.8 fraggings for every 1,000 American soldiers serving in Vietnam, not including gun and knife assaults.

'Fragging' rare in Iraq, Afghanistan; Only one soldier has been charged with killing his commander during the wars

"These people knew the war was pretty much lost, that they were going to be sacrificed," said Texas A&M University history professor and Vietnam veteran Terry Anderson. "They just wanted to get out of Vietnam."

After the 1968 Tet offensive, enlisted troops in Vietnam increasingly felt their lives were being placed at risk for a losing cause.

"Many of them were trying to go through the motions without getting themselves killed," said Duke University history professor Alex Roland.

"If an officer or hard-charging sergeant was in his foxhole and a grenade rolled in, you probably would never know where it came from."

The only other member of the military charged with murdering a superior since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began is army Sgt. Hasan Akbar of the 101st Airborne Division. Akbar was sentenced to death for a 2003 grenade-and-rifle attack at a base in Kuwait prior to his unit's move into Iraq.

But while Akbar's victims included those of a higher rank, they were not his direct commanding officers. Prosecutors said he launched the attack because he was concerned about U.S. troops killing fellow Muslims in the Iraq war. Akbar's lawyers argued he was too mentally ill to have planned the attack.

Prosecutors and defence lawyers in the Martinez case declined to comment yesterday. Along with murder, Martinez is also charged with illegally giving government printers and copiers to an Iraqi, and illegally possessing a firearm, alcohol and explosives.

Allen's widow said last year her husband was working with Esposito to stop black-market sales of military equipment when they were attacked.

In Vietnam, fragging increased as drafted troops became more demoralized during the conflict's later years.

Both Roland and Anderson said today's all-volunteer military, compared with soldiers being forced into duty in Vietnam, is the primary reason why fragging attacks are almost nonexistent in Iraq and Afghanistan. The conditions in Iraq are also much less conducive to the crime, Roland said.

"There's not as much isolated operation," Roland said.

"One of the things about Vietnam was the extremes of small-unit activity, where a squad or platoon would go out on patrol and it was just them and the jungle. They were out of sight of other Americans. "In Iraq, you never know when a helicopter might be going over or a newsman comes along," he said.

# Ottawa urges dismissal of challenge to Afghan detainee policy

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**PUBLICATION:** Kingston Whig-Standard (ON)

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** National/World

**PAGE:** 11

**SOURCE:** The Canadian Press

**BYLINE:** Jim Bronskill

**DATELINE:** OTTAWA

**WORD COUNT:** 424

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A federal lawyer characterized a legal challenge to the government's prisoner transfer policy in Afghanistan as "a political submission" that should be thrown out of court.

Government counsel J. Sanderson Graham told the Federal Court of Canada yesterday there's no evidence to support the case mounted by human rights groups.

If successful, the motion to strike the application for review would derail the case before the parties get to the heart of the matter.

Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association contend a December 2005 transfer arrangement between Canada and Afghanistan lacks adequate safeguards to prevent torture of prisoners.

Allegations have persisted since April that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were mistreated after being handed over to the Afghan government.

The government confirmed in May there had been accusations of abuse in six individual cases, and that Canada was looking into the complaints.

Ottawa has renegotiated the 2005 agreement with Kabul to allow Canadian officials to check up on the detainees following their transfer.

Graham said the rights groups have not produced specific evidence showing anyone has actually been abused. They cannot rely upon assumptions for which there is no proof, he said.

In a response filed with the court, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association say such specifics are unnecessary. They note that in deportation and extradition cases the Federal Court has simply demanded evidence that there is a serious risk of torture in the destination country.

"The standard of proof in such matters cannot and must not be too onerous."

The human rights groups say reports of widespread of abuse in Afghanistan mean that handing detainees over to local authorities exposes them to substantial risk of torture, a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The government argues the Charter does not apply in this case because Canada is not an occupying power and does not exercise military or civilian control in any part of Afghanistan.

"There's no evidence that Afghanistan consents to the application of the Charter within its borders, and therefore there is no Canadian authority to enforce it in Afghanistan," Graham told the court.

In its response, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association call the federal position "an erroneous and even frightening view of the law.

"The exercise of military force, including of detention, is perhaps the most fundamental projection of state power."

Graham said a detainee who wished to complain about alleged abuses could do so by taking legal action in Canada.

Justice Anne Mactavish asked whether it is realistic to think an Afghan detainee would be able to pursue such an avenue. "You're presuming they know about the Charter."

Paul Champ, a lawyer for the human rights groups, said during a break in the proceedings the notion that Afghan prisoners could institute proceedings in a Canadian court was "simply unbelievable." The government is "desperate that this matter not be heard on its merits," Champ said.

# Giggles pour down on Dion; But will the Liberal leader have the last laugh?

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**PUBLICATION:** Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** National/World

**PAGE:** 10

**SOURCE:** The Canadian Press

**BYLINE:** Alexander Panetta

**PHOTO:** Tom Hanson/The Canadian Press

**DATELINE:** OTTAWA

**ILLUSTRATION:** Liberal Leader Stephane Dion is applauded by Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff (third from left) and other caucus members during his response in the House of Commons yesterday to the Conservatives throne speech.

**WORD COUNT:** 554

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They call laughter the kiss of death in politics – and the smooches rained down upon Stephane Dion from the Conservative benches yesterday.

By the time he finished a 45–minute speech in which he declared he would not bring down the government, the Liberal leader was deluged with derisive guffaws.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper joined in as his troops sniggered openly at Dion. The laughter first erupted when Dion declared that the Liberal party was tough on crime.

The mockery grew louder as Dion launched into a lengthy defence of his record on climate change while lambasting the Tories' abandonment of the Kyoto accord.

Dion persisted without acknowledging his opponents, who by this time were gobsmacked by a case of the mass giggles. It was so widespread at one point that even Michael Ignatieff – the Liberals' deputy leader who sits right next to Dion – cupped his face to stifle a laugh.

But Dion plodded ahead.

He did it in English that was sometimes stilted enough to prompt barbed heckles from his opponents.

Dion drew the loudest laughs as he read press releases from environmental groups who accuse the Tories of cancelling Liberal programs and replacing them with inferior ones.

"And I quote the Sierra Club," Dion began.

"Federal programs were slashed and the importance of climate change was downplayed. An entire year was lost. End of quote.

"But I continue to quote the Sierra Club ..."

Elizabeth May, the Green party leader, nodded her head in silent agreement from the visitors' gallery.

However, amid the knee-slapping chortles and incredulity from the Conservative benches, yesterday may have brought a silver lining in the gloom that surrounds Dion.

After weeks in which his party was embroiled in infighting and back-stabbing, there were signs that the angst-ridden Liberals had reached rock-bottom and were looking to patch up their differences. Grit MPs have spent weeks openly questioning their leader, leaking accounts of private meetings to the media and calling for the resignation of a key member of Dion's inner circle.

Hostilities degenerated into a vulgarity-laced exchange between a pair of Liberal MPs at a caucus meeting earlier this week.

But there was none of that yesterday.

Two of the Montreal MPs who called publicly for the resignation of Dion confidant Jamie Carroll went out of their way to offer a public display of affection for their leader.

In one of several standing ovations for his leader, Denis Coderre finished clapping, sat down, and stood up to resume cheering.

Another Montreal MP – Pablo Rodriguez – was one of many Liberals who made their way to the front of the Commons floor to crowd around Dion and shake his hand at the end of his speech.

The cheers for Dion grew louder as he bashed one element of the throne speech after another, accusing the Tories of ignoring child poverty, the environment, Canada's economic competitiveness, and of misleading Canadians on Afghanistan.

At one point Liberals chanted, "More! More!"

The chamber fell quiet when Dion took on the prime minister over his claim to be province-friendly.

The former unity minister in the Chretien government scolded Harper for picking fights with the premiers and invited the prime minister to consult him when crafting legislation limiting federal spending powers.

After all, he said, the Tories were promising less in that regard than what he and Chretien placed in the Liberal throne speech of 1996.

That little boast had Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe wagging his finger and offering thanks to the Liberals for giving him a slogan with which to beat the Tories in the next election: More centralist than Stephane Dion.

But the more Dion attacked them, the more the Tories heckled. Before he announced his decision to let the confidence bill pass, one Conservative MP pre-empted him with a shout.

"You're gonna vote for it anyway!"

Perhaps the loudest cheer from Liberals came when Dion made what may be among the meekest predictions in Canadian politics: that he would keep the Conservatives from winning a majority government.

Leaning back in his chair, Harper turned to his left and waved dismissively.

# A chance for reasoned reflection

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**PUBLICATION:** Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** Forum

**PAGE:** 5

**WORD COUNT:** 579

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The following editorial appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press earlier this week.

Sometimes – rarely, but some–times – something that appears to be an act of blatant political partisanship can also be in the best interest of the nation. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's appointment of former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley to head a panel looking at the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan would seem to fit that bill exactly.

It certainly works well for the Conservative government. Although no one appears to really want an election this fall, there is a lot of bluster and bravado on the part of both the government and the opposition surrounding Tuesday's throne speech, and in politics bluster and bravado can sometimes run wild, seizing the reins from reason and rationality.

If that happens, Harper may have effectively neutralized the Afghan war as an election issue. The opposition parties oppose Canada's combat mission there, the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois wanting an immediate halt to it, the Liberals under Stephane Dion wanting a throne speech promise to the Taliban that Canadian forces will quit the Kandahar war zone no later than February 2009.

The government, however, sensibly prefers to leave its options open, and Manley's panel has been asked to consider four separate paths: to maintain the status quo in a combat role; to hand over the combat role to another NATO nation and concentrate on reconstruction under the protection of those guns; to leave the combat zone and focus on reconstruction in safer areas of Afghanistan; or to completely cut and run, leaving a few soldiers behind as bodyguards for diplomats and aid workers.

Manley, perhaps as conservative a Liberal as one might find in the higher reaches of that party and its most credible spokesman on defence and foreign policy issues, has said he will not be bound by those options. Everything, he says, is "on the table."

And that works well for the nation. It is, in fact, exactly what the nation needs to resolve the bitter Afghanistan debate; to replace the petty political partisanship that has defined that discussion so far. Manley's committee will report back in January with its conclusions, a process that effectively removes Afghanistan as an election issue, at least for the Liberal party, as became clear from the squeals of outrage that emerged from party officials when Manley enthusiastically accepted the post. The Bloc Quebecois and the NDP may still squeak about the war if they choose, but no one is likely to pay them much attention now. The Liberals are constrained by a committee led by one of their elder and most distinguished statesmen, the Conservatives curtailed by their own creation of the committee.

In the event of an election, this certainly gets the Conservatives off the hook created by a country deeply divided by a war that it has never clearly understood. In that sense, it was a clever but partisan act of politics. But it is more than that. It gives Canadians, regardless of whether there is an election between now and January when the Manley report comes back, an opportunity for reasoned reflection on the role their country must play in a rapidly changing world, a world that may require an increasingly dangerous commitment from them.

# Unseemly and bizarre

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**PUBLICATION:** Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** Editorial page

**PAGE:** 4

**COLUMN:** Opinion digest

**WORD COUNT:** 82

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Jean Chretien's attempt in his memoirs to blame Paul Martin for the deaths of Canadian soldiers in Kandahar says more about him than his successor.

First, it's an unseemly invoking of the memory of our fallen soldiers in a self-serving attack on another politician.

Second, the allegation has understandably infuriated the families of many fallen soldiers because Chretien is essentially saying their loved ones died in vain.

Third, that Chretien would suggest such a thing when he committed Canada to fighting in Afghanistan in the first place is bizarre.

– Ottawa Sun

# Afghan prisoner case "political" – lawyer; Challenge of transfer policy should be thrown out, Federal Court told

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**PUBLICATION:** The  
Chronicle–Herald  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**SECTION:** Canada  
**PAGE:** A7  
**SOURCE:** The Canadian Press  
**BYLINE:** Jim Bronskill  
**WORD COUNT:** 360

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OTTAWA – A federal lawyer characterized a legal challenge to the government's prisoner transfer policy in Afghanistan as "a political submission" that should be thrown out of court.

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If successful, the motion to strike the application for review would derail the case before the parties get to the heart of the matter.

Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association contend a December 2005 transfer arrangement between Canada and Afghanistan lacks adequate safeguards to prevent torture of prisoners.

Allegations have persisted since April that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were mistreated after being handed over to the Afghan government.

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Afghan prisoner case "political" – lawyer; Challenge of transfer policy should be thrown out, Federal Court told

does not exercise military or civilian control in any part of Afghanistan.

"There's no evidence that Afghanistan consents to the application of the Charter within its borders, and therefore there is no Canadian authority to enforce it in Afghanistan," Graham told the court.

In its response, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association call the federal position "an erroneous and even frightening view of the law.

"The exercise of military force, including of detention, is perhaps the most fundamental projection of state power." Proceedings on the motion were expected to continue through Thursday.

# Throne speech gets Grit go-ahead; Dion in everyone's sights as pre-election jockeying rampant

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**PUBLICATION:** The Chronicle-Herald

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** Front

**PAGE:** A1

**SOURCE:** The Canadian Press

**BYLINE:** Joan Bryden

Deputy leader Michael Ignatieff applauds Liberal Leader Stephane Dion after his response to the speech from the throne in Ottawa on Wednesday. (Fred Chartrand / CP); Deputy leader Michael Ignatieff applauds Liberal Leader Stephane Dion after his response to the speech from the throne on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Wednesday. (Fred Chartrand / CP); Defence Minister Peter MacKay joins in a standing ovation for Prime Minister Stephen Harper from Conservative caucus members during debate of the throne speech. (Fred Chartrand / CP)

**WORD COUNT:** 674

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OTTAWA – A weakened Stephane Dion pulled the country back from the brink of a fall election Wednesday, only to have Stephen Harper push him toward another political precipice.

The Liberal leader told the House of Commons that he won't bring down Harper's minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

Instead, he introduced a lengthy amendment – carefully worded to ensure that neither the Bloc Quebecois nor the NDP will support it. Should the amendment fail, Dion said Liberals will abstain from voting on the main throne speech motion next week, thus assuring the government's survival.

It appeared to be exactly what the prime minister wanted to hear.

Harper immediately pressed home his advantage, declaring that his first act in the new parliamentary session will be to introduce a sweeping justice bill.

He said he'll allow no substantive opposition amendments to the bill and he'll make it a confidence matter, meaning the government will fall if all three opposition parties vote against it.

The Tackling Violent Crime Act will include elements of several pieces of legislation that didn't pass in the last session, including provisions on violent gun crimes, the age of sexual consent, impaired driving, bail rules and dangerous offenders.

Dion spent almost 45 minutes lambasting the throne speech before finally conceding the Liberals won't defeat the government over it. He accused the Tories of abandoning the Kyoto climate-change accord, being unclear on the Afghan mission, and ignoring the needs of the poor. But he also noted that Canadians don't want another election now.

"The official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech," he said.

"We will propose amendments, and we will not make this government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years – something Canadians have clearly shown that they do not want."

NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe reiterated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Layton blasted Dion for failing to stand up for his principles and tried to goad him into voting against the throne speech.

"That's what the NDP will be doing, showing leadership."

Harper openly mocked Dion's face-saving position, taken in the midst of internal party chaos and rising doubts about his leadership.

"I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with but then passes you anyway," Harper said.

He said the government will consider passage of the throne speech as an endorsement of its agenda: "The Opposition can't allow it to pass, and then expect to obstruct our core priorities."

The Liberal amendment calls on the government to accept the blame for failing to meet Kyoto targets, suggesting that the previous Liberal government was on track to do so. Both Layton and Duceppe scoffed at that assertion.

The amendment also calls on the government to inform NATO that Canada will end its combat mission in Kandahar on schedule in February 2009. It does not call for a full military pullout from Afghanistan.

Liberal sources said the amendment is a face-saving measure designed to give voice to the party's objections to the throne speech while ensuring that the government doesn't fall.

Dion had to be talked into the gambit. Sources said he was initially among the strongest hawks in caucus, wanting to force an election rather than risk hurting his reputation as a champion of the environment by supporting Harper's anti-Kyoto message.

However, he came under heavy pressure from many of his MPs who fear going into an election while the party is disorganized, weak in Quebec, stagnant in the polls and low on funds.

Liberals have slipped in recent opinion polls, in the wake of infighting sparked by three humiliating byelection losses in Quebec. To add to the woes, Dion lost both his Quebec lieutenant and the director general of the party's Quebec wing Tuesday – just hours before the throne speech.

It's not all smooth sailing for Harper either. He is still well short of majority territory in public opinion polls and he trails the Liberals in vote-rich Ontario.

Harper is hoping to make inroads in Quebec but Duceppe blasted him for turning his back on the province. He accused Harper of adopting the same domineering and paternalistic approach to federalism as former Liberal prime minister Jean Chretien.

'The official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech.'

# The reasons to be thankful

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**PUBLICATION:** The  
Chronicle–Herald  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**SECTION:** BCW YourVoice  
**BYLINE:** Rhonda Matthews  
**WORD COUNT:** 787

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So I never said a proper good bye. I've been back in Halifax for well over a month now. The end of my tour and return home has been very full. Now that I'm home and having time to reflect, it is over due that I post a good-bye and share those last reflections. A small cross-section of what I was a part of and what the Canadian Forces (CF) has accomplished by being a part of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission.

I am very fortunate. I am safely home with my friends and family and I walked away with the knowledge and satisfaction that I helped people. I helped over 100 women learn how to sew. This new skill will help them support their families. I helped 40 rural women learn basic hygiene and first aid for pregnancy. This will allow the women to help each other and recognize the signs when a woman in labour needs to see a doctor (Afghanistan has one of the highest infant mortality and child mortality rates in the world). A small step, but one that is in the right direction.

I helped encourage the professional game of football, something not allowed during the time of the Taliban (the Taliban used the football stadium for executions). Now, two official provincial football teams of Kandahar's youth have exercise equipment and uniforms. After all, if young men are excited about their game and their community is behind them, then they will have little time to worry about fighting. The director of sport planned a provincial football tournament. I was involved with the first ever home made product exhibition. This initiative was proposed by a local business man, educated in the west who returned to help. He saw there was a hole that needed to be filled.

There are many organizations who were offering skills training to help people help themselves. But once the training was over, there was no mechanism in place to help those people market their new skill into a successful home business or get a job with another business. He advertised the exhibition with posters, leaflets, newspaper and on local radio and TV. He got twice the number of booths then expected. There were over 3,000 visitors, more than 3,800 items on display and approximately 500,000 Afghani in sales (approx. \$10,500 Cdn). The networking that took place between businesses in the exhibition and with outside companies was priceless. The exhibition was a resounding success and Canada gave the funding to make it all possible. There are few NGOs still working in Kandahar. I worked with one such NGO that supported children with visual and hearing disabilities. Before these children would be hidden by their families and neglected. Now there is a network in place where these families can rely and communicate with one another. Some of the children attend regular class; some are home schooled with the support of dedicated teachers and volunteers provided by the NGO. These children now have a future.

Afghanistan is a dangerous place, there's no doubt about it. But it is also a beautiful place. You have to revel in the success when it happens; it's too easy to get bogged down in the misery and insecurity. The sound of war is ever present. This week there are many reasons to be thankful: that there are Afghans who are willing to put their life on the line to try and make Kandahar a better place. That the CF have dedicated personal who believe that there is good to be done. That the CF has some of the best equipment available to keep us safe against attacks. And most importantly that our Canadian values and personality helped build trust and relationships with all Afghans encountered bringing us closer to a more secure environment. The Afghan

people know who the Canadians are, who the American and British are. They know why we are there and that we truly want to help. I know I've said it before and I'll say it again: I'm very proud to have been part of this mission and if the opportunity were to arise in the future, I wouldn't hesitate to volunteer again. Happy thanksgiving.

To comment on this blog, check out [myConnet.ca](http://myConnet.ca)

# Operation in Afghanistan an eye-opener for officer; Military lawyer found Afghan people gracious despite their troubled history

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**PUBLICATION:** The Chronicle-Herald

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** DCW DarNews

**BYLINE:** Pat Lee Staff Reporter

Col. Mohammad Eshmael, deputy warden of Sarpoza Prison, speaks with Lt.-Cmdr. Gina Connor, legal adviser for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, after presenting her with a gift of flowers during a visit to the prison earlier this year.

**ILLUSTRATION:** (MASTER CPL. DARRELL PRIED / Canadian Forces); Lt.-Cmdr. Gina Connor looks over a souvenir print of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team at her home in Lucasville earlier this month. The military lawyer recently returned home after a six-month tour of duty with the team in Afghanistan. (Peter Parsons / Staff)

**WORD COUNT:** 569

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LUCASVILLE – For Lt.-Cmdr. Gina Connor, it was a team-building exercise like no other.

First, the military lawyer spent nine months training in Canada with about 200 others, primarily personnel from Land Forces Atlantic.

Then, the next seven months were spent in Afghanistan as part of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, a life-altering experience she says she'll never forget.

"I came back different," she said recently from her home in Lucasville. "I was always grateful, but now I'm more so."

Connor, a mother of three who is posted to Ottawa but commutes to her home in Halifax, said the experience left a lasting impact for a variety of reasons, not least of all because of the people she was working with.

The team is a tight-knit group of civilians, reservists and members of the military rotating in and out of Camp Nathan Smith in the heart of Kandahar and working directly with the people of Afghanistan to help re-establish authority and structures in the region. The team is doing things like working in prisons, training police officers or helping to establish local governments.

"The whole team was so passionate," she said. "There was such a great amount of positive energy. I've never seen anything like it in my life," she said.

The Land Forces Atlantic group was there from February until the end of August. Connor attributed some of the special qualities of her team to the fact that the majority were from the Maritimes. She has particular respect for those – mainly reservists from this region – who spent the most of their time "outside the wire," working directly with the Afghan people.

"They were the hearts-and-minds people . . . doing good deeds. They were working in orphanages, working in schools and dealing with the local district elders, getting to know them and getting to know what they needed," she said.

"It's amazing how such a small team can make such an impact. And they did." Connor, whose husband, Sid Connor, is the commanding officer of the Helicopter Operational Evaluation and Test Facility at Shearwater, got her start in the military in 1985 as a supply officer. She later went to law school at University of New Brunswick and rejoined the military.

She said her role in Afghanistan was to offer legal advice to base commander Lt-Col. Robert Chamberlain, as well as operations related to the team's work.

It also meant Connor got to be "outside the wire" herself much of the time.

"I consider myself one of the more fortunate people because I was one of the few people who got to work with the Afghans and, boy, did I ever learn a lot from them. These people are incredibly solid. They've been through so much, but it's so fundamental to their culture to be hospitable, to be gracious.

"This is a country that has been torn about by war, but they will offer you their last piece of fruit or whatever it is they have. They are so dignified."

The job was also a personal challenge as she had to not only be conversant in Canadian law, as it pertained to the camp, but also Afghan law as well as tribal Shariah and Pashto laws.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges was surviving summer in Afghanistan, where temperatures had been clocked at 54 C.

"The thermometer we had only went to 50, so I brought out a meat thermometer and we were somewhere between cooked ham and rare beef." Connor said that while there were obvious dangers associated with the mission, they did not deter the group.

"It's been a dangerous place. We were very well aware of that. But I can honestly tell you there wasn't a time that I didn't feel safe with my team. We were aware of the danger, but we had a job to do and went out and did it."

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# Eye-opening stint for Lucasville officer; Military lawyer found Afghan people gracious despite their troubled history

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**PUBLICATION:** The Chronicle-Herald

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** BCW BedNews

**BYLINE:** Pat Lee Staff Reporter

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Eye-opening stint for Lucasville officer; Military lawyer found Afghan people gracious despite their troubled history

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# Prime Minister Harper's Afghanistan casualty insurance policy

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**PUBLICATION:** The Guardian (Charlottetown)

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** Opinion

**PAGE:** A7

**COLUMN:** Political analysis

**BYLINE:** Martin, Don

**DATELINE:** OTTAWA

**WORD COUNT:** 754

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The nagging nightmare for ready-to-roll Conservative election strategists was having a rash of Kandahar ramp ceremonies for fallen soldiers disrupt their campaign.

It was bad news they could not predict nor manage. And as the lone military hawk up against a trio of mission doves, the blood of soldiers killed in Afghanistan during the writ period would splash disproportionately more on Stephen Harper than the other party leaders.

But this gobsmackingly shrewd prime minister has produced a Conservative dream scenario from the Afghanistan quagmire on the same day an Ipsos Reid poll for CanWest News Service becomes the first in 2007 to show his party marching into majority government territory with 40 per cent of decided voter support.

It seemed simple enough for Harper to announce a panel to pick one of four options for Canada's military future in Kandahar beyond February 2009 – an exclusive focus on security force training, a retreat to less dangerous areas of Afghanistan, ceasing military operations for reconstruction work, or a full military withdrawal from the country.

That alone would qualify as a smart pre-election move with superior optics and plenty of risk-reduction potential in the event of tragedies during a vote.

But by filling the chair slot with John Manley, the deputy prime minister who supervised the Afghanistan mission launch under the Chretien Liberals, well, that elevates the announcement into the strategic realm of evil genius.

Yes, yes, there are other members including, perish the thought, former television personality Pam Wallin.

But this will likely be called the Manley Report when it's released in five months and that puts its recommendations under a Liberal flag that current Liberal Leader Stephane Dion will find difficult, if not impossible, to angrily refute. Whatever it recommends, Harper is expected to adopt. And that means it cannot be casually shrugged off by the Official Opposition as Conservatives goose-stepping in policy lockstep with U.S. President George W. Bush.

With this single Harper masterstroke, Afghanistan has ceased to be a point of confrontation in the House of Commons this fall, it has been eliminated as an explosive issue in any fall election, and it will ultimately provide a road map for Harper's face-saving Afghanistan exit strategy with built-in independent, non-partisan credibility.

Given the prime minister's intense Conservative dislike of his party rivals, it's impossible not to view Manley's appointment as a gleeful Conservative needling of the opposition. Liberals are privately muttering that their former elder statesman sold out to the enemy.

But Manley comes with credentials that make the appointment almost bulletproof from any suggestion he's just a political patsy.

He knows the country, having been there twice – five years ago and five months ago. His contacts run deep in humanitarian causes and people like author Rory Stewart, who walked across a Taliban–ravaged Afghanistan in 2002, told me he considers Manley a highly respected friend.

That doesn't mean the prime minister didn't do his homework to ensure Manley's views were compatible with his own before extending the panel chair invitation.

Manley nicely summed up his position in the latest edition of Policy Options magazine. "There is no possible way to separate the development or humanitarian mission from the military one," he wrote. "There can be no meaningful progress on development without an improved security environment. Whenever we asked Afghans what they thought ISAF (the international security assistance force) or Canada should do, they did not hesitate to say that we must stay (or) chaos must surely ensue."

Harper could buy into that position, even if it's from a Liberal. Yet Harper's parting comments at the announcement, where he called national and international security too important for partisan nitpicking, were unscripted and seemed utterly sincere, not to mention absolutely correct.

Having moved from a hard–nosed advocate of the military mission's extension to a softer position as a parliamentary consensus–seeker to a man surrendering the decision to a review panel, the prime minister shows increasing determination to do the right thing, whatever that may be.

Of course, the move has pushed election fever to thermometer–straining temperatures, particularly after Harper's Atlantic Accord amends with Nova Scotia last week.

Inexplicably, the Liberals are showing symptoms too by rolling out an early plank of their election platform by promising modestly lower corporate taxes and vowing to build \$42 million worth of small boat harbours in Nunavut if elected. I don't get the harbour–building spree, but it sure sounds like a campaign starting–gun being cocked. For Harper, the panel ensures he now has protection if Canadian victims of Taliban violence occur during any campaign.

But for hapless Stephane Dion, it merely continues to be a nightmare that never seems to end.

Don Martin writes for the Calgary Herald.

# Bleak prospects face millions of refugees

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**PUBLICATION:** The Telegram (St. John's)

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**SECTION:** International

**PAGE:** D6

**SOURCE:** The Canadian Press

**BYLINE:** Dene Moore

**DATELINE:** Kandahar, Afghanistan

**WORD COUNT:** 357

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Abdul Qahir thought it was time to go home. After the Taliban toppled from power, Qahir packed up his family and all they could take with them and crossed the border back into his Afghan homeland.

Qahir, 57, had spent 19 years in Pakistan, most of them in a sprawling refugee camp.

He said he was very optimistic as he passed through the mountains and saw his native country stretched out before him.

But six years later, he says he is "hopeless and disappointed."

Qahir's first home back in Afghanistan was another refugee camp in the Zhari district of Kandahar province.

Even the help of international aid organizations was not enough for him, his wife and four children.

"Sometimes we used to sleep hungry," he says.

Qahir moved his family into Kandahar city but working as a labourer, the only job he could find, he's unable to pay the rent.

He needs help, he says. "Otherwise we will have to go back and get refuge in Pakistan."

Millions of Afghans fled their homeland after the 1979 Soviet invasion.

Many more left after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, when Afghanistan fell into civil war and then under the influence of the Taliban.

Since the collapse of the Taliban in December 2001, the UN High Commission for Refugees estimates more than three million Afghans have returned from Pakistan.

More than 324,000 have crossed the border this year alone.

The agency estimates about two million continue to live at 85 refugee camps throughout Pakistan.

Camps ordered closed

Now Pakistani officials, citing concerns Taliban insurgents use the border camps as a base to attack NATO and Afghan forces inside Afghanistan, have ordered four large camps along the border to close.

Yet Afghanistan doesn't seem to want the refugees either.

Sayed Amir, 41, works for the UN refugee agency that runs the camp in the Zhari district of Kandahar province.

He says there is fear in government insurgents will take advantage of the return, moving as refugees into the very heart of the Taliban movement to reinforce the insurgency while living off international aid.

"The Afghan government was scared of that, because Afghan government thought if they get refuge once in Zhari, it can create a lot of problems for the nation," he says.

"That is one of the reasons that most of the refugees were sent back to Pakistan."

The vast majority of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan's camps say Afghanistan is not secure and that they will have no homes and no work if they return.

They are not wrong, says Sahibo.

She and her husband, M. Akbar, rely on non-governmental organizations for all their daily needs in a refugee camp in Kandahar.

"Sometimes I must beg, sometimes I ask neighbours for leftovers to fill my young son's stomach," she says.

"In the camp, all the times our eyes are in search of something."

A lack of jobs, safe drinking water, accessible health care, education and housing are what awaits returning Afghan refugees, according to a recent report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

# Sherpa, Snow goose devices offer link to remote work sites; Aerial devices deliver supplies using their own guidance system

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**IDNUMBER** 200710180138  
**PUBLICATION:** Edmonton Journal  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** Business  
**PAGE:** E3  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Photo: supplied / **INNOVATION:** The descending Snowgoose is guided by precision navigation systems and powered by a small motor. ;  
**KEYWORDS:** WAR; IRAQ; ARMED FORCES; UNITED STATES  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** David Pugliese  
**SOURCE:** Ottawa Citizen; CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 647

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OTTAWA – The effects of global warming in Canada's north could provide a new market for an Ottawa company as it looks to expand its business in military unmanned aerial vehicles designed to deliver supplies behind enemy lines.

Mist Mobility Integrated Systems Technology is planning to use its aerial systems, originally built for the military and in use in Iraq and Afghanistan, to drum up sales in the civilian market, particularly in resupplying gas and oil exploration firms operating in remote northern areas.

In the past, trucks driving across frozen lakes and tundra have delivered equipment and supplies to such crews. But warmer temperatures have significantly cut down on the amount of time that those ice roads are available, says Sean McCann, president of MMIST.

"With global warming the more traditional methods of using ice roads becomes less and less effective as the seasons shorten," said McCann. "Logistics in the commercial sense becomes a bottleneck for a lot of the work being done now."

The Canadian-owned company, with 40 employees, sees the civilian market as a growth area for both its Snow goose and Sherpa systems.

The Sherpa, which is suspended underneath a parachute, uses a satellite tracking device and can guide itself to within 100 metres of its target area while carrying up to 1,000 kilograms of supplies. It is dropped out of the back of an aircraft or from a helicopter and its onboard computer determines when to open its parachute so it can touch down precisely on the right location. If needed, it can be launched as far as 25 kilometres from its target.

The firm bills the Snow goose, which operates with a parasail and is propeller-driven, as the first cargo unmanned aerial vehicle in production. The machine is outfitted with six cargo bays, each capable of carrying 45-kilograms of medical supplies, food, water, fuel or spare parts.

Sherpa, Snow goose devices offer link to remote work sites; Aerial devices deliver supplies using their own

Snow goose disperses boxes of supplies, each equipped with a small disposable parachute, over the target area. A computer system determines where and when to release the supplies so they accurately touch down in a pre-determined area. The Snow goose can be launched from an aircraft or the back of a truck.

McCann says the systems are environmentally friendly and cheaper than aircraft to operate since they use less fuel. They also don't require landing strips to be built since they can be launched from planes overhead.

McCann said the firm hopes to be operating such systems for the oil and gas industry sometime in November or December. As well, MMIST would be one-stop shopping for such customers, both providing and operating the systems, he added.

McCann also sees a role for the firm's machines in distributing relief supplies during an emergency such as a hurricane Katrina situation where access to airports is limited.

The company, however, has not turned its back on the defence market, which is still its bread and butter. MMIST has contracts with the U.S. and various NATO militaries, and both its Snow goose and Sherpa are in use in Afghanistan and Iraq with U.S. troops.

The Canadian Forces also tested the Sherpa system earlier this year at Cold Lake, Alta.

In 2004, MMIST received a \$75-million contract to provide its Snow goose to U.S. special forces for use in delivering propaganda leaflets. The company is also looking to expand the role the system can play on the battlefield, touting it as a potential surveillance platform if outfitted with cameras and sensors.

McCann said MMIST is also moving ahead with its product development by creating larger variants of its systems, which further cut down on the cost of delivering supplies.

U.S. Marines, who used the Sherpa during operations in Iraq last year, had praise for the device, noting that it was useful to resupply forces who were cut off by the enemy or who didn't have access to supplies brought in by ground convoys.

Canadian military officials examined the Sherpa for use in Afghanistan, but in a report issued in August they recommended more tests of the system be conducted at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa.

# Election-wary Liberals refuse to bring down Harper Tories; Canadians don't want a vote, Dion says -- and neither does his caucus

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**IDNUMBER** 200710180004  
**PUBLICATION:** Edmonton Journal  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A1 / FRONT  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Colour Photo: Reuters / Liberal Leader Stephane Dion responds to the throne speech. ;  
**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill and Norma Greenaway  
**SOURCE:** Ottawa Citizen; CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 718

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OTTAWA – Liberal Leader Stephane Dion threw cold water on election fever in the Commons Wednesday, saying the official Opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Dion announced the party would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected next Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government.

Currently, the Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois have already said they plan to vote against the throne speech.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Dion noted that the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the minority Liberal government in power.

"We will propose amendments, but we will not make the government fall on the throne speech, which would cause the third general election in four years -- something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Dion said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the throne speech they will have to also pass the related bills. NDP Leader Jack Layton suggested Dion is a weak leader who doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Dion's speech came after a lively caucus meeting. About 40 MPs and senators spoke up, insiders said, but only a handful were keen on a fall election at a time of internal turmoil over Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials, and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

In their response to the speech from the throne, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to come to a vote Monday.

The first vote on the throne speech is due tonight on a Bloc Quebecois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Bloc also calls for elimination of the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction by providing the right to opt out with full and unconditional compensation. The throne speech offered spending-power limits but did not go that far.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009.

In their amendment, the Liberals blame the government for failing to meet the first stage of Kyoto targets, and they call for a catch-up emissions plan in the second phase.

The amendment also calls for an anti-poverty plan, which Dion said "will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda." And it calls for corporate-tax reductions -- which the throne speech did promise -- and other measures to improve the economy.

Harper warned that the opposition can't allow the throne speech to pass and then "obstruct our core priorities."

He announced that the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, would be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government would not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

The package would combine bills that would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The most controversial proposal, opposed last session by all three opposition parties, would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge that they shouldn't be branded dangerous offenders.

Harper said Canadians are asking "how on earth" a repeat offender with a record of violence is let out on bail. "Our bill will make sure they will remain behind bars, where they belong."

The Liberals have not ruled out supporting the omnibus package, which could come before the Commons for debate as early as next week.

Several Liberal officials said Dion is willing to trigger an election, but listened to those around him who urged him to let the government govern. They also said he is strong enough to take the criticism that will come with propping up the government.

"Everyone underestimates Mr. Dion," Ottawa MP David McGuinty told reporters. "That is the hallmark of his political career. This is not over."

Election-wary Liberals refuse to bring down Harper Tories; Canadians don't want a vote, Dion says<sup>37</sup>— and

# Inmate at N.S. prison makes flag cases for families of fallen soldiers

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE JUSTICE SOCIAL  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 240

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Brent Mazerolle \_ Patriotism and honour may not be the first things that come to mind when thinking about a prison inmate.

But David Taylor has been showing a strong sense of both qualities lately, not to mention a level of craftsmanship that should serve him well when he one day steps outside the gates of the Springhill Institution.

The Fredericton man has taken on the solemn duty of providing fine wooden cases to hold the flags that are presented to the families of Nova Scotia soldiers killed in action in Afghanistan.

Nova Scotia is the first province to have a cabinet minister responsible for military relations, a portfolio held by Murray Scott, who also represents Cumberland South riding, which includes Springhill.

The idea to craft the flag cases came from conversations between Scott, his military affairs adviser Tim Dunne, and Scott's longtime friend Jamie Henwood, a shop instructor at the Springhill Institution.

When a Nova Scotia soldier dies, the provincial flag at the legislature in Halifax is lowered to half-mast. It is later presented to his or her family during the funeral.

Taylor crafts the boxes as a sideline to his other work at the institution and has taken a keen interest in their purpose.

He was happy to pose for a photo with one of his creations this week and talk to a reporter visiting the prison, but was upset to see that the flag in the case was wrinkled.

“That's not right,” he said politely but firmly when he saw it in the office of Springhill warden Ed Muise.

“I'd like to build these for everyone in the Maritimes.”

Taylor said he'd like to see the idea spread across the country, with inmates in the other regions having the honour of making them.

# Government urges dismissal of court challenge to Afghan detainee policy

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 433

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OTTAWA \_ A federal lawyer characterized a legal challenge to the government's prisoner transfer policy in Afghanistan as ``a political submission" that should be thrown out of court.

Government counsel J. Sanderson Graham told the Federal Court of Canada on Wednesday there's no evidence to support the case mounted by human rights groups.

If successful, the motion to strike the application for review would derail the case before the parties get to the heart of the matter.

Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association contend a December 2005 transfer arrangement between Canada and Afghanistan lacks adequate safeguards to prevent torture of prisoners.

Allegations have persisted since April that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were mistreated after being handed over to the Afghan government.

The government confirmed in May there had been accusations of abuse in six individual cases, and that Canada was looking into the complaints.

Ottawa has renegotiated the 2005 agreement with Kabul to allow Canadian officials to check up on the detainees following their transfer.

Graham said the rights groups have not produced specific evidence showing anyone has actually been abused. They cannot rely upon assumptions for which there is no proof, he said.

In a response filed with the court, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association say such specifics are unnecessary. They note that in deportation and extradition cases the Federal Court has simply demanded evidence that there is a serious risk of torture in the destination country.

``The standard of proof in such matters cannot and must not be too onerous."

The human rights groups say reports of widespread of abuse in Afghanistan mean that handing detainees over to local authorities exposes them to substantial risk of torture, a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The government argues the Charter does not apply in this case because Canada is not an occupying power and does not exercise military or civilian control in any part of Afghanistan.

``There's no evidence that Afghanistan consents to the application of the Charter within its borders, and therefore there is no Canadian authority to enforce it in Afghanistan," Graham told the court.

In its response, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association call the federal position ``an erroneous and even frightening view of the law.

“The exercise of military force, including of detention, is perhaps the most fundamental projection of state power.”

Graham said a detainee who wished to complain about alleged abuses could do so by taking legal action in Canada.

Justice Anne Mactavish asked whether it is realistic to think an Afghan detainee would be able to pursue such an avenue. “You’re presuming they know about the Charter.”

Paul Champ, a lawyer for the human rights groups, said during a break in the proceedings the notion that Afghan prisoners could institute proceedings in a Canadian court was “simply unbelievable.”

The government is “desperate that this matter not be heard on its merits,” Champ said.

Proceedings on the motion were expected to continue through Thursday.

# Mr. Manley goes to war

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 595

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Sometimes, rarely, but sometimes, something that appears to be an act of blatant political partisanship can also be in the best interest of the nation. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's appointment of former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley to head a panel looking at the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan would seem to fit that bill exactly.

It certainly works well for the Conservative government. Although no one appears to really want an election this fall, there is a lot of bluster and bravado on the part of both the government and the opposition surrounding Tuesday's throne speech and, in politics, bluster and bravado can sometimes run wild, seizing the reins from reason and rationality.

If that happens, Mr. Harper may have effectively neutralized the Afghan war as an election issue. The opposition parties oppose Canada's combat mission there, the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois wanting an immediate halt to it, the Liberals under Stephane Dion wanting a throne speech promise to the Taliban that Canadian forces will quit the Kandahar war zone no later than Feb. 2009, when the current terms of engagement expire.

The government, however, sensibly prefers to leave its options open and Mr. Manley's panel has been asked to consider four separate paths: to maintain the status quo in a combat role; to hand over the combat role to another NATO nation and concentrate on reconstruction under the protection of those guns; to leave the combat zone and focus on reconstruction in safer areas of Afghanistan; or to completely cut and run, leaving a few soldiers behind as bodyguards for diplomats and aid workers.

Mr. Manley, perhaps as conservative a Liberal as one might find in the higher reaches of that party — and its most credible spokesman on defence and foreign policy issues — has said he will not be bound by those options. Everything, he says is “on the table.”

And that works well for the nation. It is in fact, exactly what the nation needs to resolve the bitter Afghanistan debate, to replace the petty political partisanship that has defined that discussion so far. Mr. Manley's committee will report back in January with its conclusions, a process that effectively removes Afghanistan as an election issue, at least for the Liberal party, as became clear from the squeals of outrage that emerged from party officials when Mr. Manley enthusiastically accepted the post. The Bloc and the NDP may still squeak about the war if they choose, but no one is likely to pay them much attention now. The Liberals are constrained by a committee led by one of their elder and most distinguished statesmen, the Conservatives curtailed by their own creation of the committee.

In the event of an election, this certainly gets the Conservatives off the hook created by a country deeply divided by a war that it has never clearly understood. In that sense it was a clever but partisan act of politics. But it is more than that. It gives Canadians — regardless of whether there is an election between now and January when the Manley report comes back — an opportunity for reasoned reflection on the role their country must play in a rapidly changing world, a world that may require an increasingly dangerous commitment from them.

# Liberals back down from election over throne speech, but new showdown looms

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 635

---

OTTAWA \_ A weakened Stephane Dion pulled the country back from the brink of a fall election Wednesday, only to have Stephen Harper push him toward another political precipice.

The Liberal leader told the House of Commons that he won't bring down Harper's minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

Instead, he introduced a lengthy amendment \_ carefully worded to ensure that neither the Bloc Quebecois nor the NDP will support it. Should the amendment fail, Dion said Liberals will abstain from voting on the main throne speech motion next week, thus assuring the government's survival.

It appeared to be exactly what the prime minister wanted to hear.

Harper immediately pressed home his advantage, declaring that his first act in the new parliamentary session will be to introduce a sweeping justice bill.

He said he'll allow no substantive opposition amendments to the bill and he'll make it a confidence matter, meaning the government will fall if all three opposition parties vote against it.

The Tackling Violent Crime Act will include elements of several pieces of legislation that didn't pass in the last session, including provisions on: violent gun crimes, the age of sexual consent, impaired driving, bail rules, and dangerous offenders.

Dion spent almost 45 minutes lambasting the throne speech before finally conceding the Liberals won't defeat the government over it.

He accused the Tories of abandoning the Kyoto climate-change protocol, being unclear on the Afghan mission, and ignoring the needs of the poor. But he also noted that Canadians don't want another election now.

"The Official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech," he said.

"We will propose amendments, and we will not make this government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years \_ something Canadians have clearly shown that they do not want."

NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe reiterated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Layton blasted Dion for failing to stand up for his principles and tried to goad him into voting against the throne speech.

"That's what the NDP will be doing, showing leadership."

Harper openly mocked Dion's face-saving position, taken in the midst of internal party chaos and rising doubts about his leadership.

“I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with but then passes you anyway,” Harper said.

He said the government will consider passage of the throne speech as an endorsement of its agenda: “The Opposition can't allow it to pass, and then expect to obstruct our core priorities.”

The Liberal amendment calls on the government to accept the blame for failing to meet Kyoto targets, suggesting that the previous Liberal government was on track to do so. Both Layton and Duceppe scoffed at that assertion.

The amendment also calls on the government to inform NATO that Canada will end its combat mission in Kandahar on schedule in February 2009. It does not call for a full military pullout from Afghanistan.

Liberal sources said the amendment is a face-saving measure designed give voice to the party's objections to the throne speech while ensuring that the government doesn't fall.

Dion had to be talked into the gambit. Sources said he was initially among the strongest hawks in caucus, wanting to force an election rather than risk hurting his reputation as a champion of the environment by supporting Harper's anti-Kyoto message.

However, he came under heavy pressure from many of his MPs who fear going into an election while party is disorganized, weak in Quebec, stagnant in the polls, and low on funds.

Liberals have slipped in recent opinion polls, in the wake of infighting sparked by three humiliating byelection losses in Quebec.

To add to the woes, Dion lost both his Quebec lieutenant and the director general of the party's Quebec wing Tuesday \_ just hours before the throne speech.

It's not all smooth sailing for Harper either \_ he is still well short of majority territory in public opinion polls and he trails the Liberals in vote-rich Ontario.

Harper is hoping to make inroads in Quebec but Duceppe blasted him for turning his back on the province. He accused Harper of adopting the same domineering and paternalistic approach to federalism as former Liberal prime minister Jean Chretien.

# Derisive laughter from Conservative benches pours down on Dion

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 553

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OTTAWA \_ They call laughter the kiss of death in politics \_ and the smooches rained down upon Stephane Dion from the Conservative benches Wednesday.

By the time he finished a 45-minute speech in which he declared he would not bring down the government, the Liberal leader was deluged with derisive guffaws.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper joined in as his troops sniggered openly at Dion. The laughter first erupted when Dion declared that the Liberal party was tough on crime.

The mockery grew louder as Dion launched into a lengthy defence of his record on climate change while lambasting the Tories' abandonment of the Kyoto accord.

Dion persisted without acknowledging his opponents, who by this time were gobsmacked by a case of the mass giggles. It was so widespread at one point that even Michael Ignatieff \_ the Liberals' deputy leader who sits right next to Dion \_ cupped his face to stifle a laugh.

But Dion plodded ahead.

He did it in English that was sometimes stilted enough to prompt barbed heckles from his opponents.

Dion drew the loudest laughs as he read press releases from environmental groups who accuse the Tories of cancelling Liberal programs and replacing them with inferior ones.

``And I quote the Sierra Club," Dion began.

``Federal programs were slashed and the importance of climate change was downplayed. An entire year was lost. End of quote.

``But I continue to quote the Sierra Club. . ."

Elizabeth May, the Green party leader, nodded her head in silent agreement from the visitors' gallery.

However, amid the knee-slapping chortles and incredulity from the Conservative benches, Wednesday may have brought a silver lining in the gloom that surrounds Dion.

After weeks in which his party was embroiled in infighting and back-stabbing, there were signs that the angst-ridden Liberals had reached rock-bottom and were looking to patch up their differences.

Grit MPs have spent weeks openly questioning their leader, leaking accounts of private meetings to the media and calling for the resignation of a key member of Dion's inner circle.

Hostilities degenerated into a vulgarity–laced exchange between a pair of Liberal MPs at a caucus meeting earlier this week.

But there was none of that Wednesday.

Two of the Montreal MPs who called publicly for the resignation of Dion confidant Jamie Carroll went out of their way to offer a public display of affection for their leader.

In one of several standing ovations for his leader Denis Coderre finished clapping, sat down, and stood up to resume cheering.

Another Montreal MP \_ Pablo Rodriguez \_ was one of many Liberals who made their way to the front of the Commons floor to crowd around Dion and shake his hand at the end of his speech.

The cheers for Dion grew louder as he bashed one element of the throne speech after another, accusing the Tories of ignoring child poverty, the environment, Canada's economic competitiveness, and of misleading Canadians on Afghanistan.

At one point Liberals chanted, ``More! More!"

The chamber fell quiet when Dion took on the prime minister over his claim to be province–friendly.

The former unity minister in the Chretien government scolded Harper for picking fights with the premiers and invited the prime minister to consult him when crafting legislation limiting federal spending powers.

After all, he said, the Tories were promising less in that regard than what he and Chretien placed in the Liberal throne speech of 1996.

That little boast had Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe wagging his finger and offering thanks to the Liberals for giving him a slogan with which to beat the Tories in the next election: More centralist than Stephane Dion.

But the more Dion attacked them, the more the Tories heckled. Before he announced his decision to let the confidence bill pass, one Conservative MP pre–empted him with a shout.

``You're gonna vote for it anyway!"

Perhaps the loudest cheer from Liberals came when Dion made what may among the meekest predictions in Canadian politics: that he would keep the Conservatives from winning a majority government.

Leaning back in his chair, Harper turned to his left and waved dismissively.

# Bleak prospects face millions of refugees on return to Afghanistan

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 682

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan \_ Abdul Qahir thought it was time to go home.

After the Taliban toppled from power, Qahir packed up his family and all they could take with them and crossed the border back into his Afghan homeland.

Qahir, 57, had spent 19 years in Pakistan, most of them in a sprawling refugee camp.

He said he was very optimistic as he passed through the mountains and saw his native country stretched out before him.

But six years later, he says he is ``hopeless and disappointed."

Qahir's first home back in Afghanistan was another refugee camp in the Zhari district of Kandahar province. Even the help of international aid organizations was not enough for him, his wife and four children.

``Sometimes we used to sleep hungry," he says.

Qahir moved his family into Kandahar city but working as a labourer, the only job he could find, he's unable to pay the rent.

He needs help, he says. ``Otherwise we will have to go back and get refuge in Pakistan."

Millions of Afghans fled their homeland after the 1979 Soviet invasion. Many more left after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, when Afghanistan fell into civil war and then under the influence of the Taliban.

Since the collapse of the Taliban in December 2001, the UN High Commission for Refugees estimates that more than three million Afghans have returned from Pakistan. More than 324,000 have crossed the border this year alone.

The agency estimates that about two million continue to live at 85 refugee camps throughout Pakistan.

Now Pakistani officials, citing concerns that Taliban insurgents use the border camps as a base to attack NATO and Afghan forces inside Afghanistan, have ordered four large camps along the border to close.

Yet Afghanistan doesn't seem to want the refugees either.

Sayed Amir, 41, works for the UN refugee agency that runs the camp in the Zhari district of Kandahar province.

He says there is fear in government that insurgents will take advantage of the return, moving as refugees into the very heart of the Taliban movement to reinforce the insurgency while living off international aid.

“The Afghan government was scared of that, because Afghan government thought if they get refuge once in Zhari, it can create a lot of problems for the nation,” he says.

“That is one of the reasons that most of the refugees were sent back to Pakistan.”

The vast majority of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan's camps say Afghanistan is not secure and that they will have no homes and no work if they return.

They are not wrong, says Sahibo.

She and her husband, M. Akbar, rely on non-governmental organizations for all their daily needs in a refugee camp in Kandahar.

“Sometimes I must beg, sometimes I ask neighbours for leftovers to fill my young son's stomach,” she says.

“In the camp, all the times our eyes are in search of something.”

A lack of jobs, safe drinking water, accessible health care, education and housing are what awaits returning Afghan refugees, according to a recent report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Interviews with thousands of refugees and people displaced internally by fighting found chronic food shortages. More than half said they did not have access to safe drinking water.

Just four per cent of those interviewed cited security as a major issue. Only 38 per cent had a stable income, and 60 per cent were living below the poverty line of US\$1 a day.

A third of those interviewed said their children were not attending school, and more than one third had at least one child working.

Sahibo's husband, Akbar, says the family should never have come back from Pakistan.

“I thought that when we move towards our country everything will be all right,” he says.

“How long will we be living like this?”

He says he was so destitute he had to marry off his daughters. Now his nine-year-old son's future weighs heavily on his mind.

“This is the age for my son to get an education but he collects old plastic bags and old articles,” Akbar says, weeping.

The UN refugee agency and other aid agencies have warned of a looming humanitarian crisis.

In April, tens of thousands of Afghan refugees were forcibly deported from Iran. Many of them are now living in refugee camps in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian agencies say they are already overwhelmed with Afghans fleeing fighting internally and refugees who have returned. There are simply not enough resources for more returnees.

“We are worried that if there is a sudden return of Afghans from the camp this may turn into a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan,” Salvatore Lombardo, a UNHCR representative in Kabul, said in a recent interview.

The Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar is co-ordinating with UN agencies to prepare for winter, when snow and rain will cut off access to many parts of rural Kandahar.

The team is not directly involved with refugee camps but the UN agencies who are have a contingency plan to ensure they have enough supplies such as food, blankets and tents, said Capt. Joanne Blais, spokeswoman for the PRT.

“We, the PRT and the UN, are trying to help the responsible department within government to make sure they have the necessary capacity to respond,” Blais says.

– With files from Kandahar reporter A.R. Khan.

# 'Fragging' attacks rare in Iraq, Afghanistan, with only 1 known case so far

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 609

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RALEIGH, N.C. \_ American troops killed their own commanders so often during the Vietnam War that the crime earned its own name \_ ``fragging."

But since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military has charged only one soldier with killing his commanding officer, a dramatic turnabout that most experts attribute to the all-volunteer military.

And some argue the case of Staff Sgt. Alberto Martinez shouldn't even be considered fragging, since his motive was unclear.

Fragging, derived from the hard-to-trace weapon of choice in such attacks, the fragmentation grenade, has varying definitions, from the killing of any superior to the murder of a soldier's direct commander to avoid combat.

Martinez, 40, of Troy, N.Y., and a member of the state's Army National Guard, is scheduled to appear Thursday in a courtroom at Fort Bragg, where the army's version of a grand jury is hearing evidence in his murder case.

He faces a possible death sentence if convicted of setting off several grenades and a mine in one of Saddam Hussein's former palaces near Tikrit, Iraq.

The June 2005 blast, initially blamed on a mortar round, killed Martinez's company commander, Capt. Phillip Esposito, 30, of Suffern, N.Y., and 1st Lt. Louis Allen, 34, of Milford, Pa., the unit's operations officer.

At a hearing in Kuwait early in the case, a witness testified Martinez had said twice that he disliked Esposito and was going to ``frag" him.

Between 1969 and 1971, the army reported 600 fragging incidents that killed 82 Americans and injured 651. In 1971 alone, there were 1.8 fraggings for every 1,000 American soldiers serving in Vietnam, not including gun and knife assaults.

``These people knew the war was pretty much lost, that they were going to be sacrificed," said Texas A&M University history professor and Vietnam veteran Terry Anderson. ``They just wanted to get out of Vietnam."

After the 1968 Tet offensive, enlisted troops in Vietnam increasingly felt their lives were being placed at risk for a losing cause.

``Many of them were trying to go through the motions without getting themselves killed," said Duke University history professor Alex Roland. ``If an officer or hard-charging sergeant was in his foxhole and a grenade rolled in, you probably would never know where it came from."

The only other member of the military charged with murdering a superior since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began is army Sgt. Hasan Akbar of the 101st Airborne Division. Akbar was sentenced to death

for a 2003 grenade-and-rifle attack at a base in Kuwait prior to his unit's move into Iraq.

But while Akbar's victims included those of a higher rank, they were not his direct commanding officers. Prosecutors said he launched the attack because he was concerned about U.S. troops killing fellow Muslims in the Iraq war. Akbar's lawyers argued he was too mentally ill to have planned the attack.

Prosecutors and defence lawyers in the Martinez case declined to comment Wednesday. Along with murder, Martinez is also charged with illegally giving government printers and copiers to an Iraqi, and illegally possessing a firearm, alcohol and explosives.

Allen's widow said last year her husband was working with Esposito to stop black-market sales of military equipment when they were attacked.

In Vietnam, fragging increased as drafted troops became more demoralized during the conflict's later years.

Both Roland and Anderson said today's all-volunteer military, compared with soldiers being forced into duty in Vietnam, is the primary reason why fragging attacks are almost nonexistent in Iraq and Afghanistan. The conditions in Iraq are also much less conducive to the crime, Roland said.

“There's not as much isolated operation,” Roland said. “One of the things about Vietnam was the extremes of small-unit activity, where a squad or platoon would go out on patrol and it was just them and the jungle. They were out of sight of other Americans.

“In Iraq, you never know when a helicopter might be going over or a newsman comes along,” he said.

# Taliban ambush kill 1 policeman, wounds 4 in southern Afghanistan

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 72

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KABUL, Afghanistan \_ The Taliban have ambushed a police patrol in southern Afghanistan, killing one officer and wounding four others.

Officials say the patrol was attacked in the Niven district of Kandahar province.

The area's police chief, Sayed Agha Saqib, says there are no reports of Taliban casualties.

Taliban attacks against police have increased this year, with over 600 officers killed by the insurgents.

Overall, official figures show more than 5,200 people have died in fighting in Afghanistan this year.

This makes it the deadliest year since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, according to a count by The Associated Press.

# Japan Cabinet OKs bill limiting participation in afghan mission

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 375

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The bill was approved at a Cabinet session late Wednesday, Justice Minister Kunio Hatoyama said.

The measure must now be approved by the country's parliament.

The new bill would limit Japanese ships to refueling and supplying water to ships on anti-terrorism patrols, but does not allow them to refuel vessels involved in military operations as well as other activities including rescue operations and humanitarian relief.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's government made the changes in the mission, which started in 2001, in hopes of mollifying opposition critics who said it involved Japan too deeply in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The opposition Democratic Party of Japan, or DPJ, controls the upper house of parliament, giving it the power to slow \_ but not definitively kill \_ the ruling bloc's legislative agenda. The United States, meanwhile, has clamored for extension of the mission.

The current mission expires Nov. 1. The new bill was to go to the Diet, or parliament, for a plenary vote.

The government has argued strenuously for the extension, saying that pulling out would leave Japan \_ which depends on the Middle East for almost all of its oil imports \_ sidelined in the fight against global terrorism.

“It's clear to anyone that this bill is the biggest issue facing parliament. The Cabinet is set to approve the bill tonight, and is determined to secure parliamentary approval,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura told reporters. “I am confident of winning support from the opposition.”

Hoping to secure a settlement before the mission's expiration, Fukuda showed willingness to negotiate a compromise with the opposition.

Still, Japan's temporary withdrawal from the mission seems inevitable.

Opponents have criticized the mission as a “free gas station,” but officials say the operation allows the country to participate in the fight against terrorism while not violating its pacifist constitution.

“Though the mission is scaled down, Japan is better off keeping its presence there,” said Tsuneo Watanabe, adjunct fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

The DPJ demands the mission be scrapped, saying coalition military operations in Afghanistan there were not properly approved by the United Nations. They say the mission violates Japan's war-renouncing constitution and have alleged the oil supplied by Japanese ships was diverted to the U.S. war on Iraq.

Public opinion has been divided.

The latest newspaper poll by the Asahi newspaper on Tuesday showed 39 percent of 2,113 respondents supporting Japan's naval mission, with 44 percent opposing. No margin of error was provided.

# Taliban ambush kill 1 policeman, wounds 4 in southern Afghanistan

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 76

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KABUL, Afghanistan – The Taliban have ambushed a police patrol in southern Afghanistan, killing one officer and wounding four others.

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The area's police chief, Sayed Agha Saqib, says there are no reports of Taliban casualties.

Taliban attacks against police have increased this year, with over 600 officers killed by the insurgents.

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(The Associated Press)

## --Throne Speech Roundup--

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 449

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The Conservatives have laid out a roadmap they hope will bring them closer to a coveted majority government, promising major tax cuts and sweeping anti-crime legislation in their throne speech.

But the speech also declares that Canada cannot meet its greenhouse-gas reduction targets under the Kyoto protocol, drawing fire from opposition parties and environmentalists.

If the speech is defeated in a confidence vote, Prime Minister Harper will hit the campaign trail in pursuit of a majority and use the document as the backbone of his election platform.

If it survives, Harper has already declared he expects a freer rein in imposing his agenda on Parliament -- and is prepared to use the threat of confidence votes to make it happen.

(Reaction)

The government will find out the likely fate of its throne speech later today.

The N-D-P and Bloc Quebecois are making it clear -- they will vote against the Conservative government's blueprint.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion ripped into the speech for its abandonment of Kyoto, its ambiguity on Afghanistan, and its failure to address poverty.

But he quickly added he will consult his party before announcing his intentions this afternoon, and cautioned that Canadians wouldn't want a third election in three years.

N-D-P Leader Jack Layton says the speech takes Canada in the wrong direction.

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe says his party will reject the speech as well, accusing the Tories of abandoning the environment while refusing to pull Canada's troops out of southern Afghanistan.

(Afghanistan)

The throne speech says Canada should stay directly involved in Afghanistan until at least 2011.

The new proposed deadline is two years beyond the current mandate approved by Parliament and the speech repeats Prime Minister Harper's promise to put the future of the mission to a vote in the House of Commons.

The speech ties Canada's eventual exit strategy to the training of Afghan security forces, including the army and police, and their ability to stand on their own two feet.

It says the government believes that can be achieved by 2011.

Former defence minister Gordon O'Connor caused a firestorm of controversy last spring by suggesting that

the army would be needed in Afghanistan until at least 2011.

(Kyoto)

The Harper government says Canada cannot meet its Kyoto commitments, but the throne speech promises measures to fight greenhouse gases.

The Tories promise to continue fighting climate change, invest in public transit, introduce a clean-water strategy, and protect sensitive wildlife.

The statement that Canada can't meet its climate-change targets is sure to anger the opposition and environmentalists.

And it will place pressure on Liberal Leader Stephane Dion, an ardent defender of Kyoto, as he decides whether to support the speech.

(Law and Order)

The throne speech says a new Tackling Violent Crime bill will include measures on impaired driving, age of sexual consent, stricter bail conditions, and mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

Prime Minister Harper has made it clear his new law and order legislation will be a confidence measure.

That means an opposition defeat of an anti-crime bill will trigger an election.

The government also plans to announce a toughening of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

(Taxes)

The Harper government plans to stop taking as much out of our pockets.

The throne speech calls for multiyear tax cuts for individuals and businesses.

And the government will complete its promised cut to the G-S-T by trimming it by one percentage point, to five per cent from six.

The government has previously cut the tax by a point.

A two-point cut was a promise in the last federal election.

(more)

# TOR OUT YYY

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17  
**KEYWORDS:** ADVISORIES  
**PUBLICATION:** bnw  
**WORD COUNT:** 344

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Liberal Leader Stephane Dion says he'll decide later today whether to accept or reject the Harper government's throne speech.

The leaders of the N-D-P and the Bloc Quebecois already have their minds made up -- their parties will vote against it.

They're complaining about the Conservative stand on the environment and its plan to extend the Afghanistan mission to 2011.

That leaves the Liberals to decide whether to prop up the minority Conservative government. (4)

(Interpol-Manhunt-Website)

New details are emerging about the doings of a Canadian schoolteacher wanted by Interpol on child pornography charges.

Investigators allege that Christopher Neil was posting under the alias ``Peter Jackson" on a website popular with westerners teaching abroad.

Up until last month, they say the B-C man had made more than 300 posts on Dave's E-S-L Cafe.

One post gives advice on how to erase porn from computer hard drives, and he also comes across as savvy on how to avoid police checks when applying for jobs.

Neil is believed to be on the run after arriving in Thailand last Thursday.

Police allege it's his image that appeared in 200 Internet child-porn photos. (4)

(Netherlands-Cda-Soldiers)

A Dutch court has ordered two Canadian soldiers jailed for assaulting a gay man in Amsterdam back in May.

But both 22-year-old men were cleared of charges of targeting the victim because of his sexual orientation.

The court sentenced Eric Wright to five months and Ryan Dowie to 45 days, for stomping on the victim's face so hard that he suffered a fractured skull and broken nose.

The Canadians were stationed in the Netherlands awaiting deployment to Afghanistan. (4)

(BC-Pickton-Trial) (Audio: 44)

The defence has rested its case in Robert Pickton's murder trial in New Westminster, B-C.

The Crown and defence will begin closing arguments November 13th, and the jury could start deliberating the case a week later.

The Crown contended Pickton deliberately killed and butchered six women, while the defence tried to portray him as a dim-witted pig farmer unaware about everything that happened on his sprawling property. (4)

(Holiday-Retail)

Canadian holidays shoppers hoping to catch an early break with our soaring dollar shouldn't expect one.

While the loonie has been keeping pace with — even outpacing — the U-S greenback for a month now, retailers say the cost of doing business here means prices will likely stay the same. (4)

(Colbert-President?)

Now, here's an American presidential candidate you can really laugh at.

Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert (kohl-BEHR') is running for president.

The political satirist made his announcement on ``The Colbert Report" last night, saying, ``After nearly 15 minutes of soul-searching," he's heard the call.

He'll run in his home state of South Carolina as both a Democrat and a Republican — that way, he says, he can lose twice. (4)

(NewsWatch by Karen Rebot)

# Throne–Speech–Update (Layton, Duceppe, Goodale)

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 127

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OTTAWA — The Liberals are spending the next few hours trying to determine how to respond to the Harper government's throne speech.

Liberal M–P's meet this morning to decide if they'll join the other two opposition parties and topple the minority Conservative government.

Speaking on C–T–V's Canada A–M this morning, Liberal House leader Ralph Goodale says there was plenty of discussion last night and all options are still on the table.

All three parties are unhappy with the throne speech's approach to the Kyoto Accord and Afghanistan.

N–D–P leader Jack Layton told Canada A–M this morning he is ready for an election and he took a little shot at the Liberals' indecision over how they'll vote.

Layton said voters get turned off by a party that says one thing and doesn't have the courage of its convictions.

Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe says although Canadians may not want another election, they'll realize it's necessary.

He compared going to the polls to going to the dentist.

(CTV–s)

SAF

# Afghan–Posthumous–Degree

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 152

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WINNIPEG \_ The University of Manitoba is awarding a posthumous bachelor of arts degree to an Edmonton–based soldier who was killed in Afghanistan.

Corporal Jordan Anderson was a member of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

The 25–year–old man had completed nearly all the requirements of his B–A through the university's military support office when he was killed in a roadside blast July 4th.

The degree will be presented to his widow, Amanda Anderson, at a convocation ceremony tomorrow.

George MacLean, the acting head of the U of M's political studies department, says the full–time soldier did very well in his courses and was highly thought of by the university.

He says the decision to award the degree was made after Anderson's friends and family members contacted the U of M.

MacLean also says it will mark the first time the institution has granted a posthumous degree to a member of the Canadian Forces.

Major Erik Liebert (LEE'–buhrt) of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry says the degree will help shed more light on the lives of Canadian soldiers.

Two scholarships have also been established in Anderson's name.

(The Canadian Press)

krt

# Austria-Cda-Terror-Arrests

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 153

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SHAWINIGAN, Quebec — The lawyer for a man who police allege participated in terrorist plots against Germany and Austria says his client should be released from jail.

Rene Duval told Quebec court yesterday Said Namouh should be freed because he wasn't brought before the court on break-and-enter charges within the three-day limit set out in the law.

Duval's motion will be heard next week.

Namouh, who is of Moroccan origin, is being held on a charge of break-and-enter and mischief at his former spouse's residence, in addition to terrorism charges.

The 35-year-old is also to return to court in Montreal tomorrow on charges he conspired to bomb unspecified targets in Vienna.

He was arrested in the small Quebec town of Maskinonge last month as authorities in Austria and Canada arrested four people in a suspected international bomb plot.

The R-C-M-P alleges Namouh has connections with al-Qaida.

They also allege he was involved in a plot to make threats in a video to be broadcast on the Internet, warning that Germany and Austria would be attacked if they didn't pull their troops out of Afghanistan.

(The Canadian Press)

RvA

# TOR OUT YYY

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17  
**KEYWORDS:** ADVISORIES  
**PUBLICATION:** bnw  
**WORD COUNT:** 325

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The federal Conservatives have laid out their roadmap for governing.

The throne speech delivered last night promises major tax cuts and sweeping anti-crime legislation, while saying that Canada cannot meet its Kyoto commitments to cut greenhouse-gas emissions.

The N-D-P and the Bloc say they cannot support the Tories' latest agenda and will vote against the speech.

Now, we await a decision from the Liberals that could result in a fall election.

Stephane Dion will meet with his caucus and announce this afternoon whether his Liberals will accept the throne speech or reject it, which would topple the minority government. (2)

(Throne-Afghanistan) (Audio: 06)

The throne speech says Canada should stay directly involved in Afghanistan until at least 2011.

The new proposed deadline is two years beyond the current mandate approved by Parliament, and the speech repeats Prime Minister Harper's promise to put the future of the mission to a Parliamentary vote.

The speech ties our eventual exit strategy to the training of Afghan security forces and their ability to stand on their own two feet. (2)

(Que-Legislature)

When one considers all the words that could be deemed hurtful, chances are good that ``weathervane" isn't one of them.

But it's now a ``no-no" to call someone that name in the Quebec legislature.

Speaker Michel Bissonnet has added the word ``weathervane" to the list of what's considered to be unparliamentary language in Quebec.

Premier Jean Charest has repeatedly called Opposition Leader Mario Dumont a ``weathervane" for always changing directions -- and yesterday, elevated Dumont to ``national weathervane."

The Speaker decided enough was enough and ruled the comment was out of line. (2)

(Mtl-Police-Stun-Gun)

A man is in critical condition in a Montreal hospital after police Tasered him.

Police say the man appeared drunk and became aggressive when they questioned him on Sunday, so they used a stun gun to subdue him.

It happened the same weekend that a man died after he was Tasered by police at Vancouver International Airport.

Pathologists are trying to determine if the stun gun played a role in the death. (2)

(US–Sandstorm)

Traffic is moving again on a highway north of Los Angeles, after a deadly pileup that happened during a sandstorm.

At least two people were killed and 16 others were hurt in crashes on the highway yesterday, as high winds whipped up sand and near-zero visibility. (2)

(Cheney–Obama)

They may not be kissing cousins, but Lynne Cheney says they're certainly cousins.

The wife of America's Republican vice-president says she's traced Dick Cheney's ancestors --- and has found he's distantly related to Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama.

An Obama spokesman jokes there's a ``black sheep" in every family. (2)

(NewsWatch by Karen Rebot)

# INDEX:Defence, International, Justice, Politics

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 124

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OTTAWA – Federal lawyers argue that a legal challenge to the government's prisoner transfer policy in Afghanistan should be thrown out of court.

Government counsel J. Sanderson Graham told Federal Court today there's no evidence to support the case mounted by human rights groups.

Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association contend a 2005 transfer arrangement between Canada and Afghanistan lacks adequate safeguards to prevent torture of prisoners.

Graham said the parties have not produced specific evidence showing anyone has actually been abused.

Allegations have persisted since April that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were mistreated after being handed over to the Afghan government.

Ottawa subsequently renegotiated the 2005 agreement with Kabul to allow Canadian officials to check up on the detainees following their transfer.

(The Canadian Press)

# Harper introduces newest members of Tory team at rousing caucus

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 207

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OTTAWA – Prime Minister Stephen Harper opened the caucus room doors today to allow media a few minutes' access to a campaign-style meeting, where he introduced the newest members of his team to a boisterous crowd of Tory parliamentarians.

As the opposition Liberals discussed whether they will force an election over Tuesday's throne speech, Harper boasted of his party's success in September's Quebec byelections, introducing former Roberval mayor Denis Lebel, who is now the Conservative MP for Roberval–Lac–St–Jean.

And, to rousing cheers, he brought Alberta's new senator, Bert Brown, to the podium – nine years after he first won a provincewide election nominating him for the post.

Harper said the byelection success in Roberval–Lac–St–Jean 'showed spectacularly that Conservative values are Canadian values, and are Quebec values.'

The televised introductions came as Liberal Leader Stephane Dion conferred privately with his caucus over the future of Harper's government following Tuesday's throne speech.

With the Bloc Quebecois and the NDP saying they will vote against the Conservative agenda, it was left up to the Liberals to decide whether they can stomach Harper's blend of law and order, a prolonged Canadian presence in Afghanistan and scrapping of the former Liberal government's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse-gas emissions.

(The Canadian Press)

# TOR OUT YYY

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**DATE:** 2007.10.17  
**KEYWORDS:** ADVISORIES  
**PUBLICATION:** bnw  
**WORD COUNT:** 337

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All eyes in Ottawa will be on Liberal Leader Stephane Dion later today.

He'll announce by mid-afternoon whether his party will accept the Harper government's throne speech of last night, or reject it — thereby forcing Canadians into a fall election campaign.

The N-D-P and Bloc Quebecois already say they'll vote against the speech.

Both parties are particularly angry over the Conservatives' stand on the environment, and with their plan to keep our soldiers in Afghanistan through to 2011.

If the throne speech is defeated in a confidence vote, Prime Minister Harper would call an election and use the speech as the backbone of his campaign platform. (3)

(Throne-Tax Cuts)

The Harper government plans to stop taking as much out of our pockets.

The throne speech calls for multi-year tax cuts for individuals and businesses, and the Tories will complete its promised further one-point cut to the G-S-T.

The government has previously cut the tax by a percentage point to six per cent. (3)

(Interpol-Manhunt) (Audio: 07)

The R-C-M-P says a Canadian man who international police believe is the source of graphic Internet child pornography could face charges in Canada.

Corporal Lana Prosper, with the National Child Exploitation Co-ordination Centre, says it will all depend on where Christopher Neil is found — noting some countries don't have laws that protect children.

If Neil is arrested in one of those countries, then it would become a Canadian investigation and prosecution.

Neil was last seen in Thailand on Thursday.

His family in Maple Ridge, B-C is pleading for him to surrender. (3)

(BC-Pickton-Trial)

All evidence in Robert Pickton's multiple murder trial in B-C has been heard and the defence has rested its case.

Lawyers on both sides are now preparing their final arguments, to begin November 13th.

The jury could begin its deliberations a week later.

The Port Coquitlam pig farmer is on trial on six counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of six sex-trade workers from Vancouver's downtown east side.

Pickton is due to face a further trial on 20 similar charges. (3)

(Dalai-Lama)

The Dalai Lama will receive the U-S Congressional Gold Medal during an elaborate ceremony at the Capitol today.

Among those hosting the event will be U-S President Bush, who has tried to walk a fine line between honouring the Buddhist spiritual leader and soothing China, which considers the Dalai Lama a threat. (3)

(US-Senator-Craig)

Idaho Senator Larry Craig says he goes to the bathroom to go to the bathroom -- and that's it.

He made the comments to N-B-C's Matt Lauer in an interview that aired last night.

Craig insists he was entrapped in a police sex sting at a Minneapolis airport men's room, and was not aware of its reputation as a spot to cruise for gay sex. (3)

(NewsWatch by Karen Rebot)

# Battle on the home front: Changing public opinion

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**BYLINE:** Pierre Martin  
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## Afghanistan Mission

Recent polls do not augur well for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Is the battle on the home front definitely lost or can opinion turn around in the coming months?

That's a critical question for Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the wake of Tuesday's throne speech in which he made his first-ever admission that his government was prepared to keep troops in Afghanistan beyond 2009.

But will he succeed in rallying opinion?

At one point, that may have seemed impossible, but there is a growing belief that a turnaround in public opinion might not be impossible after all.

Last week, participants at a policy retreat known as the Banff Forum were asked whether they supported the Afghan mission.

Although there were reservations, a strong majority of those present answered positively. Most participants even endorsed extension beyond 2009, in sharp contrast with opinion polls.

Interestingly, many participants admitted that their opinion had shifted from negative to positive in the course of the discussion.

Even if the prospects for success in Afghanistan are uncertain, this sample of well-informed citizens concluded that Canada's military presence in that troubled country is worth the cost.

As we brace for months of debate on the Afghan mission in the quiet context of the Manley review panel, or perhaps soon in an election campaign, can we expect the same from the Canadian public as a whole?

That is probably what Harper was counting on when he unveiled in the throne speech that Canadian troops might stay in Afghanistan beyond 2009.

But will he succeed in rallying opinion?

Why not? After all, the case for Canada's military presence in Afghanistan to support the country's reconstruction has strong merits.

Nonetheless, obstacles abound.

The first obstacle is the widely held belief that Canadian troops are in Afghanistan mainly in response to pressures from the U.S.

Those who hold that opinion are overwhelmingly likely to oppose the mission, whereas those who believe that Canada's involvement stems from a multilateral commitment – who are still a majority – are much more likely to support it.

The problem is that Harper's Conservatives are the only unequivocal partisan voices in support of the mission and, for those who don't intend to vote for them – a majority of Canadians – Harper's foreign policy is perceived as so closely aligned with that of the Bush administration that he has been unable to make a credible case for multilateralism.

Another obstacle is the difficulty for many people in understanding the link between the military presence and the humanitarian and reconstruction aspects of the mission. Hardly anyone would disagree that helping Afghanistan recover socially and economically from decades of conflict is a goal worth pursuing.

Although Canadian civilians who work over there do not always approve of the way some allies conduct military operations around them, few if any of them would welcome an immediate withdrawal of their country's troops.

Nonetheless, polls show that many of those who oppose the military mission also support the reconstruction efforts.

Such cognitive dissonance may be excusable on the part of individual citizens, but from a political party, it is nothing short of irresponsible.

A third obstacle to a turnaround of public opinion is the imbalance in the distribution of the burden among allies in Afghanistan.

Given that Canadian troops have been in the thick of the action and have sustained a higher level of casualties than most NATO countries, Canadians are entitled to believe that their country has paid its dues and it's time for others to take their turn.

The greatest test of the Harper government's diplomatic skills will be its capacity to convince one of its allies to do what Paul Martin's government agreed to do on Canada's behalf in 2005: take the heat in the most dangerous regions.

Meanwhile, as diplomats negotiate this rotation with allies, Jean Chretien's criticism of his successor for accepting the Kandahar assignment – somehow implying that it was okay to participate in a multilateral mission, as long as others paid the price for it – is simply appalling.

In the end, success in passing the buck to other allies would probably be most likely to bring about a major shift in opinion on the mission, but that is far from a done deal.

The last obstacle, of course, remains Quebec, where opinion is most strongly opposed to the Afghan mission, and where a turnaround would seem most difficult to achieve.

Quebecers' historical reluctance to support armed interventions abroad is only part of the reason.

On nearly all perceptions or attitudes that shape opinion on Afghanistan, most Quebecers just don't believe the

arguments in favour of the mission.

Yet, if federal elections were called soon, Quebec is where the Conservatives might make the most gains.

That puts things in perspective.

On the home front, Afghanistan is only a battle. What matters is to win the war.

Pierre Martin is a professor of political science at the Universite de Montreal and a member of the Universite de Montreal–McGill Research Group in International Security.

# Dion dodge hardly an inspiration

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**SECTION:** News  
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**BYLINE:** James Travers  
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Clever as ever, the Prime Minister is rephrasing the big political question: Once about Stephen Harper and trust, it's now about Stephane Dion and competence.

A beleaguered Liberal leader only made it easier to answer yesterday by choosing temporary self-preservation instead of a risky election fought on principles. His tortured reluctance to topple the Conservative minority over a throne speech crafted to offend his sensibilities buys time. But it does little to inspire confidence in Dion's fitness to lead or repair the fissures in a party that once prided itself on being the Western world's most successful.

Much as he did in bungling Quebec by-elections, Dion allowed Liberals to be boxed-in by the throne speech. As the Prime Minister made clear yesterday, Conservatives will spend the coming weeks nailing down the lid, beginning with a confidence vote on omnibus crime legislation.

Liberals helped make their current mess possible. In overlooking more accomplished candidates in choosing a leader with suspect strategic skills and weak caucus support, convention delegates set in motion the events now unfolding here.

All of this makes capital theatre even if elsewhere the brinksmanship is watched, if at all, with disbelief. But what's largely missed in witnessing Harper play politics so adroitly – doubters need only consider the artful pre-throne speech orchestration of an unusual press conference, an equalization deal with Nova Scotia and the appointment of John Manley's Afghanistan panel – is how much this Prime Minister is changing the Canadian brand.

In 4,000 words and 40 minutes Tuesday night, Harper described a country many of its citizens would struggle to recognize. That Canada breaks its international treaty commitment to fight climate change, fuels unfounded fears to advance a law-and-order agenda and effectively commits to extending a polarizing Afghanistan mission months before Parliament will consider the options.

Subtler if equally worthy of citizen attention is what the Prime Minister has in mind for the federation. With a policy mix reflecting his concerns for provincial rights and market efficiency Harper is simultaneously proposing to loosen and tighten central control.

Generally appealing to Conservatives and an affront to Liberals, Harper's recreation of Canada more in the image of its North American neighbour than its traditional European soulmates demands thoughtful deconstruction. Normally that work would fall to the official opposition on Parliament Hill or in an election. But these times are far from normal.

A suspect leader and a party so unprepared for a campaign that it genuflects to calculated humiliations is poorly positioned to expose the fault lines in government policies or proselytize alternatives. Dion's escape, one he tested yesterday, is to first bring the question back to Harper's designs on Canada, then offer the country a choice.

That won't be easy. His vision isn't clear, Liberals are infected with the opposition dissention virus and are now the common target for their collective rivals. Rarely does it get worse in the blood sport played here with such relish.

Conservatives are vulnerable on the environment, Afghanistan and for an authoritarian core character that unsettles voters whenever it surfaces. But those are mere asterisks as long as the country is questioning about the Liberal leader, not the Conservative Prime Minister.

James Travers' national affairs column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

# For better or for worse

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**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Star  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Ont  
**SECTION:** Letter  
**PAGE:** AA07  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Fred Chartrand The Canadian Press Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper listens as Governor General Michaëlle Jean delivers the Speech from the Throne in Ottawa on Tuesday. ;  
**COPYRIGHT:** © 2007 Torstar Corporation  
**WORD COUNT:** 607

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Harper's agenda lacks bold vision

Editorial, Oct. 17

In rejecting the Harper government's throne speech as lacking bold vision, you have focused on three primary areas of the speech and in each case seemingly misread the points raised.

The issue of cities and their need for financial support, while a real concern, is not a federal responsibility. The Constitution clearly identifies the provinces as masters of municipal government and therefore it is the provincial government that should be addressing the financial burdens faced by cities. The federal government can provide dollars, but the bold vision that you say is needed for cities must come from the province.

On the environment, it is clear that the Harper government – after 13 years of Liberal governments, which failed to produce any meaningful policies to address the climate issue – has at least addressed the realities of the failed Kyoto Protocol, and looks to the knowledge that exists within Canada to develop policies that are both environmentally sound and economically sustainable.

As for Afghanistan, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been clear that Canada cannot, as a nation of prosperity and freedom, simply abandon a nation less fortunate. While it is clear the government's view is that Canada should remain in Afghanistan until the end of 2011, it also wants to explore the role of Canada post-2009 through the new non-partisan panel, and signalled that Parliament will vote on any further extensions to our mission.

Positioning Canada as a leader and protector of freedom and basic human rights around the globe is worthy of praise, and speaks to a bold new vision for Canada and its place as a global neighbour.

Blair Johnston, Mississauga

D-Day for Stephane Dion

Oct. 17

No longer Canada's "New Government," our now self-declared "Clean Government" continues to ignore urban Canada, where nearly 80 per cent of Canadians live. And now Prime(time) Minister Stephen Harper has promised to follow through with his promise of a second cut to the GST, without a single mention of the

needs of cities – many of them so cash-strapped, they may need to cut all sorts of necessary services.

If this government thinks it's better to reward citizens with a little extra cash – and no doubt hopes to garner more votes in the process – perhaps some of us could respond that we would prefer that a share of the GST go to help our cities survive and thrive as healthy environments in which to live and work.

Neglected and scorned by our short-sighted government, perhaps we should now turn to our provincial governments. Could they not simply increase their PST by that same percentage and turn it over to their cities?

If the feds won't do it, let the provinces take the initiative to stand up for citizens and brighten our cities with that same little copper cent.

Robin Askew, Toronto

Say goodbye to future surpluses as the Harper Conservatives lead Canada down the same path as the United States. There, massive surpluses evaporated in windfall tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. Now the U.S. is back to crippling deficits and a ballooning debt – part of the reason the greenback is plummeting.

I'm getting sick of inadequate transit, understaffed hospitals, crowded schools, crumbling infrastructure and growing poverty. I am sick of seeing decades of sacrifice and cutbacks being squandered by giving the money saved to the wealthiest in the form of tax cuts.

If Prime Minister Stephen Harper can't bring himself to help the average Canadian, then let him just throw the surplus at the debt. At least that will lower interest payments and give the next generation of Canadians a better chance at rebuilding our country.

Sean Doolittle, Mississauga

# PM's latest spin plan bit of a coup

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**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Star  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Ont  
**SECTION:** News  
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**BYLINE:** Slinger  
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The Prime Minister has a deep appreciation of the old Ottawa proverb that there's more than one way to skin a journalist.

His goal is simple. He wants to control the message.

This isn't a radical departure. Paul Martin wanted to do it, too, but he didn't have any control. Sadder still, he didn't have a message.

Stephen Harper definitely has a message. It is: "I'm right (and if you don't think so, you're stupid)." And he has a lot of control over it, since 99.9 per cent of the media in the country agree with him. But the few skeptics can hash things up. They can take things out of context. They can disagree with him, something he finds disagreeable and strives to avoid no matter what.

Not talking to the media at all worked pretty well for a while. His plan to build his own press centre died on the drawing board, but it showed his disdain for the National Press Centre, where it was obvious (he tried a press conference there once, and didn't like it) that if the journalists are allowed to run the proceedings, anybody can ask questions, even drunks off the street.

His latest is a bit of a coup.

Say you wanted to take Canada's combat role in Afghanistan off the agenda during the (possibly) upcoming election, and say you wanted to get a widely dubious country to start looking favourably on your idea that Canadian troops should keep fighting there until hell freezes over, or until Afghanistan becomes as prosperous and civilized as Etobicoke?

Then how about appointing a respected commission that will deliberate through the (possibly) upcoming election campaign, effectively taking the issue off the agenda, and that will then recommend Canadian troops keep fighting the good fight until etc., etc.?

What a clever dodge! Except it's not even slightly innovative. And anyway, who's going to believe you're sincere if your commission is partisan?

Harper's twist: John Manley. A former parliamentary adversary, a former top-drawer Liberal minister, a man sincerely confident of his own sincerity and absolutely certain that he can never be swayed by the self-serving opinions of others.

How non-partisan can you get? And leave aside the thought that this description exactly fits the profile of what police consider to be the easiest mark for con men?

That's irrelevant because, by an astonishing coincidence, Manley's personal belief about what should be done in Afghanistan is identical to the PM's.

Harper must have been delighted when he learned this. It's his idea of an open mind.

And anybody who thinks the other commissioners are no more likely to oppose Harper's Afghanistan position than the Raptors' cheerleaders are to cheer for some other team forgets that this is a free country. They can decide for themselves, even if the Prime Minister happens to think the Raptors' cheerleaders' approach to their task could serve as a useful example to some people in this country whose minds aren't quite so open.

The nice thing for the commissioners – nice and convenient – is that they don't have to wait until after an election, or even until their January deadline, to write their report. They don't have to bore themselves to death listening to experts, or put themselves in harm's way by visiting Afghanistan. They already know what they're going to write. They can do it now and get it out of the way.

The even nicer thing is they don't have to worry that their report will sit on a shelf gathering dust. The Prime Minister's Office is already busy putting their recommendations into effect.

Slinger's column appears Tuesday and Thursday.

# Dion chooses the wise course in trying to make this government work

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**PUBLICATION:** Vancouver Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final C  
**SECTION:** Editorial  
**PAGE:** A16  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Photo: Jean Levac, Canwest News Services / Gov.—Gen. Michaelle Jean delivered the Conservatives' carefully crafted throne speech on Tuesday. ;  
**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA  
**SOURCE:** Vancouver Sun  
**WORD COUNT:** 528

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It took a curious admission of weakness, but the novel approach Liberal leader Stephane Dion took to the throne speech led to the only acceptable result. Canadians are spared an election that few want at this time, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative government have a stronger hand in delivering their legislative agenda.

Dion's comparison of the throne speech that was delivered Tuesday to the speech he imagined the Conservatives would have given if they had a majority seemed to imply that he feared that would be the result if an election were held now. But it was also a back-handed compliment, a recognition that in this speech Harper had crafted an agenda that would be largely acceptable to the broad middle of the Canadian electorate.

Much of it was simply a repackaging of worthy initiatives that were rolled out in previous legislation that had stalled in Parliament. The notable exceptions are the more definitive statements on climate change and Canada's role in Afghanistan.

The new mid-term target of a 20-per-cent reduction of greenhouse gases by 2020 is a welcome addition to what is still a vague plan for addressing the pressing issue. So is the official recognition of the obvious that Canada will not meet its commitments under the Kyoto Accord.

That alone would have given a stronger Liberal party an excuse to topple the Conservatives, but Dion at least recognized his own frailty if not the fact that the Liberal government in which he served as environment minister bears much of the blame for this failure.

Dion also signalled that the Liberals are willing to support an extension of Canada's current mission in Afghanistan, if as implied in the throne speech, it is transformed from an active combat mission to a training mission.

As for the omnibus crime bill promised in the speech, Dion said Liberals already supported five of the six earlier bills that will now be rolled into one. As for the sixth, a renewal of anti-terrorism measures, Dion reserved judgment until the actual bill is introduced.

Dion has followed the wisest course in allowing the throne speech to pass, both for the country and the interests of his party. The Liberals are in no shape to fight an election. They are dispirited, poverty-stricken and racked by internal dissension.

But he still faces a very tough road ahead.

The decision by Harper to drop the fatuous label of "Canada's New Government" marks a maturity and self-confidence by the Conservatives that is growing while Dion and the Liberals continue to flounder.

The Liberals will have little choice but to continue to find ways to allow legislation that flows from the throne speech to pass, just as they have the speech itself. In so doing, they can serve Canadians well while giving Dion a chance to find his feet.

Dion is right. Canadians do want Parliament to work. The Conservatives have put forward a reasonable agenda.

As the details emerge and legislation is put through Parliament, the Liberals and other opposition parties should hold it to the light, propose amendments as they see fit and debate its merits. But as Dion has done this week, however reluctantly, that opposition should be aimed at making government work better, not bringing it down.

# Liberals to abstain from confidence vote, won't trigger election

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**PUBLICATION:** Vancouver Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A1 / FRONT  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Colour Photo: Chris Wattie, Reuters / Liberal leaderStephane Dion with deputy leader Michael Ignatieff in the House of Commons. ;  
**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill and Norma Greenaway  
**SOURCE:** CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 739

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OTTAWA — Liberal leader Stephane Dion threw cold water on election fever in the Commons Wednesday, saying the official Opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Dion announced the Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government. Currently, the Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois have already stated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

"We will propose amendments but we will not make the government fall on the throne speech, which would cause the third general election in four years — something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Dion said.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Dion noted that the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberal government in power.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the throne speech they will have to also pass the laws that flow from it. NDP leader Jack Layton suggested Dion is a weak leader who doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election while the Liberals continue to struggle with internal turmoil over Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials, and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

In response to the speech, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to

come to a vote Monday.

The first vote on the throne speech is due tonight on a Bloc Quebecois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

The NDP has repeatedly called for the immediate withdrawal of troops. The government said in the throne speech that while Parliament will vote on the future of the mission, it prefers a training program that would last until 2011.

In their amendment, the Liberals blame the government for failing to meet the first stage of targets under the Kyoto accord on climate change and call for a catch-up plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the second phase.

The amendment also calls for an anti-poverty plan, which Dion said "will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda." And it calls for corporate tax reductions — which the government did promise in the throne speech — and other measures to improve the economy.

Harper came out swinging against the opposition, warning that they cannot allow the throne speech to pass and then "obstruct our core priorities."

He cited a promised sweeping anti-crime bill as the government's top priority for the new parliamentary session, and he shrugged off Dion's criticism of the speech as posturing.

"As I listened to the leader of the Opposition, he reminded me a little bit of a professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with, but then passes you anyway."

The prime minister announced that the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, would be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government would not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

The package would combine bills to stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The most controversial proposal, opposed last session by all three opposition parties, would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge that they shouldn't be branded dangerous offenders.

# 'Losing in Afghanistan' Ex-UN envoy: Dire consequences if it continues

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**PUBLICATION:** The Winnipeg Sun  
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**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 13  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of PADDY ASHDOWN Former MP  
**BYLINE:** REUTERS  
**DATELINE:** BRUSSELS  
**COLUMN:** World Watch  
**WORD COUNT:** 254

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International forces are unlikely to win their battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan, risking a regional conflict that could match the magnitude of previous world wars, a former top UN envoy said yesterday.

Lord Paddy Ashdown — former UN high representative and European Union special representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina — said that failure by the NATO-led force would have far wider repercussions than any losses in Iraq.

He called for the appointment of a high-level coordinator to lead the foreign mission in Afghanistan.

"I think we are losing in Afghanistan now, we have lost I think and success is now unlikely," he said in an interview.

"I believe losing in Afghanistan is worse than losing in Iraq.

"It will mean that Pakistan will fall and it will have serious implications internally for the security of our own countries and will instigate a wider Shiite, Sunni regional war on a grand scale."

"Some people refer to the First and Second World Wars as European civil wars and I think a similar regional civil war could be initiated by this (failure) to match this magnitude," Ashdown added.

The number of Taliban suicide attacks in Afghanistan — more than 100 so far this year — is set to top last year's record of 123, the UN says, and most victims are civilians.

The Taliban have increased the number of suicide attacks after suffering heavy casualties in conventional clashes with foreign forces and the Afghan army, security analysts say.

While Western forces, alongside the Afghan army, have claimed victories against Taliban rebels in the south, many remote areas and some towns remain under rebel control and insurgent attacks have also spread north to regions previously considered safe.

Frustration with the government over the slow pace of development, official corruption and the lack of law and order have all played into rebel hands.

Ashdown is a former British Liberal Party leader. KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Master of disaster Dion shows why he'll lead the Liberals to electoral annihilation

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**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON  
**COLUMN:** National Affairs  
**WORD COUNT:** 504

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Just as this week's throne speech gave us a taste of the Conservative campaign to come, Stephane Dion's response to it yesterday showcased all the reasons the Liberals are staring at almost certain electoral disaster.

Let's start with the leader.

Rising in the Commons for his keynote address, Dion managed to turn an already badly written speech into 43 minutes of audio hell, his message utterly lost in his staccato delivery of mangled English pronunciation.

Adding to the annals of great moments in parliamentary oratory, Dion gave us memorable lines such as: "Let me turn my intention now to the more problematic issue."

'SLAP IN THE FATE'

The Conservative policies on the environment, we're sure he said, are "a slap in the fate."

Seated on the Commons frontbench next to the Liberal leader, his wannabe successor Michael Ignatieff spent most of Dion's speech looking as though he couldn't decide whether to nap or cry.

In an election campaign, there isn't a meeting hall in the country that Dion couldn't empty with a stump speech even half as bad as his pitch to Parliament.

In the pivotal televised leaders' debates, he would have an entire nation lunging for their channel changers.

All of which wouldn't be quite so fatal if the Liberal leader actually had something enlightening to say on his party's policies, even if he has trouble saying it.

Instead, Dion opened yesterday's critique of the Conservative throne speech with a grim and dire warning to all Canadians about – wait for it – Harper's hidden agenda that would befall the nation if the Tories were to win a majority in the next election.

The work of our police officers and the safety of our citizens would be threatened by the absolute dismantling of the gun registry, and our environment would be neglected," Dion predicted to much howling from the Tory benches.

Rural economies would be threatened," he continued, and "health care would be subject to an agenda of Conservative radical reform. We can imagine what that means."

Scary stuff, indeed.

As for all those election tripwires that Harper and his strategists have set for the Liberals in the hopes of triggering an election, Dion stopped barely short of running through the Commons waving a white flag.

## CRIME BILL

For instance, the Conservatives will be introducing an omnibus crime bill that includes all six pieces of law-and-order legislation that were stalled in the Commons mill, and died with the last session of Parliament.

Harper has told the Liberals to take it or leave it — pass it all, or go into an election.

Dion's response? "We obviously want to see exactly what the legislation will say. We could support it if (it) includes measures that would make Canadians safer. We Liberals are tough on crime and we are tough on the causes of crime."

Dion showed equal toughness on Afghanistan, calling on Harper's administration to "immediately notify NATO and the Government of Afghanistan that our combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009."

That said, the Conservative plan to extend the mission until 2011 to train Afghan troops and police is just hunky-dory with the Liberal leader.

Like all great epics in oratory, Dion saved the best for last.

The Liberals may have an ineffective leader and not much in the way of an election platform, but by golly they have a strategy to show the country what they are really made of.

"To conclude, the official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech," Dion said as a tense hush fell on the Commons.

Therefore, the Liberals are proposing sweeping amendments to the Conservative throne speech, he announced.

And if those don't pass, well then a Liberal party led by Stephane Dion will avoid an election by not voting at all.

The good news is the latest poll shows there are still 12% of Canadians who think Dion would make the best prime minister.

# Letters to the Editor Column

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## LET DION FADE AWAY

Mr. Dion is correct when he says that most Canadians do not want another election. However, most of us could tolerate another election if only to see the leader of the official opposition stand by his party's principles. Mr Harper boxed you into a corner, Mr Dion, and you chose a weaselly, self serving way out of a jam by blaming your choice on "the majority of Canadians who do not want another election."

We will enjoy watching you fade off into the sunset Mr. Dion.

Au Revoir

M. NICHOLS

LOCKPORT, MAN.

On the other hand ...

## GIVE PEOPLE CHOICE

Who is Stephan Dion to tell Canadians what they want?

I would whole heartedly support another election if it meant a Canadian could be heard on the issues, like the military presence in Afghanistan, the Kyoto Protocol and the like.

I don't think many Canadians are impressed by this budget or this government. Give the choice back to the people, rather than letting the Liberals abstain (which for Dion just seems like another word for cop out).

Dion must take a stand and voice how he feels about this budget like the other parties have done, and as a party leader should. The longer Dion lets Harper's government run Canada like he has the majority the more people are thinking about an NDP landslide next time.

JESSICA CAMERON

WINNIPEG

You must be dreaming. An NDP landslide?

PHOTO TICKET ABSURDITY

In B.C. they quit using photo radar because it was costing more to prosecute people fighting tickets than they were collecting. Yet in Manitoba we get stuck with paying the wages of THREE crown attorneys to appeal a \$200 traffic ticket.

That deserves a standing ovation for stupidity. Its no wonder real criminals walk out of the law courts laughing. If it takes three for a traffic ticket, there are not enough in Manitoba for a murder trial.

LEN BLOOM

ILE DES CHENES, MAN.

It's a wonderful system.

COREN BANG ON

I read Michael Coren's commentary last week regarding our x-rated world and I want to applaud and thank your paper for publishing his opinion.

As a family man I am sickened by the amount of landmines I constantly have to dodge to keep my children from viewing unwanted pornography in our daily lives. And now the hotel industry has become infected with this disease also.

The free speech crowd continue to declare "if you don't like it turn it off" but that shouldn't mean that pornographers should be able stick it in our faces unchallenged and unchecked.

Pornography destroys families, ruins relationships and kills intimacy yet it has become this continent's drug of choice.

I hope men like Michael Coren never give up on sharing their views and I pray that the media will never prevent them.

AL BERNIER

WINNIPEG

Coren is a Sun staple.

SHOPPERS BEWARE

My family spent the weekend in Grand Forks, N.D. Leaving Friday, we entered the U.S. at 12:30 p.m. and returned Sunday at 9:30 a.m.

However, upon re-entering Canada, we were informed our trip was three hours short of the required 48-hour exemption for purchases.

Despite being well within the allowable limits of alcohol and clothing, we still had to pay duty on our purchases.

So, be careful. Canada Customs is timing travellers. As told by a Customs officer, it's not a two-day exemption, it's a 48-hour exemption.

BRIAN BOWMAN

WINNIPEG

Thanks for the tip.

# Master of disaster Dion shows why he'll lead the Liberals to electoral annihilation

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**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON  
**COLUMN:** National Affairs  
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All of which wouldn't be quite so fatal if the Liberal leader actually had something enlightening to say on his party's policies, even if he has trouble saying it.

Instead, Dion opened yesterday's critique of the Conservative throne speech with a grim and dire warning to all Canadians about – wait for it – Harper's hidden agenda that would befall the nation if the Tories were to win a majority in the next election.

The work of our police officers and the safety of our citizens would be threatened by the absolute dismantling of the gun registry, and our environment would be neglected," Dion predicted to much howling from the Tory benches.

Rural economies would be threatened," he continued, and "health care would be subject to an agenda of Conservative radical reform. We can imagine what that means."

Scary stuff, indeed.

As for all those election tripwires that Harper and his strategists have set for the Liberals in the hopes of triggering an election, Dion stopped barely short of running through the Commons waving a white flag.

## CRIME BILL

For instance, the Conservatives will be introducing an omnibus crime bill that includes all six pieces of law-and-order legislation that were stalled in the Commons mill, and died with the last session of Parliament.

Harper has told the Liberals to take it or leave it — pass it all, or go into an election.

Dion's response? "We obviously want to see exactly what the legislation will say. We could support it if (it) includes measures that would make Canadians safer. We Liberals are tough on crime and we are tough on the causes of crime."

Dion showed equal toughness on Afghanistan, calling on Harper's administration to "immediately notify NATO and the Government of Afghanistan that our combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009."

That said, the Conservative plan to extend the mission until 2011 to train Afghan troops and police is just hunky-dory with the Liberal leader.

Like all great epics in oratory, Dion saved the best for last.

The Liberals may have an ineffective leader and not much in the way of an election platform, but by golly they have a strategy to show the country what they are really made of.

"To conclude, the official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech," Dion said as a tense hush fell on the Commons.

Therefore, the Liberals are proposing sweeping amendments to the Conservative throne speech, he announced.

And if those don't pass, well then a Liberal party led by Stephane Dion will avoid an election by not voting at all.

The good news is the latest poll shows there are still 12% of Canadians who think Dion would make the best prime minister.

# 'Losing in Afghanistan' Ex-UN envoy: Dire consequences if it continues

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**SOURCETAG:** 0710180453  
**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 10  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of PADDY ASHDOWN Former MP  
**BYLINE:** REUTERS  
**DATELINE:** BRUSSELS  
**WORD COUNT:** 254

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International forces are unlikely to win their battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan, risking a regional conflict that could match the magnitude of previous world wars, a former top UN envoy said yesterday.

Lord Paddy Ashdown — former UN high representative and European Union special representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina — said that failure by the NATO-led force would have far wider repercussions than any losses in Iraq.

He called for the appointment of a high-level coordinator to lead the foreign mission in Afghanistan.

"I think we are losing in Afghanistan now, we have lost I think and success is now unlikely," he said in an interview.

"I believe losing in Afghanistan is worse than losing in Iraq.

"It will mean that Pakistan will fall and it will have serious implications internally for the security of our own countries and will instigate a wider Shiite, Sunni regional war on a grand scale."

"Some people refer to the First and Second World Wars as European civil wars and I think a similar regional civil war could be initiated by this (failure) to match this magnitude," Ashdown added.

The number of Taliban suicide attacks in Afghanistan — more than 100 so far this year — is set to top last year's record of 123, the UN says, and most victims are civilians.

The Taliban have increased the number of suicide attacks after suffering heavy casualties in conventional clashes with foreign forces and the Afghan army, security analysts say.

While Western forces, alongside the Afghan army, have claimed victories against Taliban rebels in the south, many remote areas and some towns remain under rebel control and insurgent attacks have also spread north to regions previously considered safe.

Frustration with the government over the slow pace of development, official corruption and the lack of law and order have all played into rebel hands.

Ashdown is a former British Liberal Party leader. KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Crime fight tops agenda Harper urges opposition MPs to pass omnibus law-and-order bill 'in days'

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**SOURCETAG:** 0710180445  
**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
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**SECTION:** News  
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**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of STEPHEN HARPER Won't tolerate stalling tactics  
**BYLINE:** KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU  
**WORD COUNT:** 291

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Dangerous criminals are loose on the streets because of lax laws that opposition MPs have been loath to help fix, Prime Minister Stephen Harper charged yesterday.

Urging opposition MPs to pass an omnibus crime-busting bill "in days," the PM warned he will not tolerate stalling tactics from the Liberals.

While six of 13 crime bills were held up last session, Harper all but assured swift passage of the Tackling Violent Crime Act by banning substantial amendments and making it a confidence vote.

The omnibus crime package will resurrect legislation that did not pass in the last session of Parliament -- on dangerous offenders, impaired drivers, bail reform, prison terms for gun crimes and raising the age of protection to fend off Internet child predators.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion insisted his party strongly supports victims and signalled his party is open to passing the crime package. But he flatly rejected another key throne speech pledge on Afghanistan, demanding the government immediately notify NATO that Canada will end its combat role in Kandahar in February 2009.

## 'ENORMOUS SACRIFICES'

Harper, who wants to prolong the mission by two years to 2011, insisted the Afghanistan role is "noble and necessary" and at the heart of Canada's foreign policy.

"We cannot understate the responsibilities we have undertaken to the Afghan people, to the international community and to the men and women of our diplomatic, development and defence forces who have made such enormous sacrifices on behalf of all of us," he said.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe accused Harper of trying to buy time by appointing the blue-ribbon panel of "pawns" to study the issue.

"He decided to create a committee to deceive the public," Duceppe said.

Steve Staples, director of the Rideau Institute, believes Harper has been "emboldened" to extend the mission by recent byelection results and the chance to exploit divisions in Liberal ranks.

"It's worrisome, because any extension of this mission unchanged is simply going to mean billions more dollars being spent and a lot more caskets coming home," he said. KEYWORDS=CANADA

# Liberals to stand down

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180444

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**SECTION:** News

**PAGE:** 4

**ILLUSTRATION:** photo by Tom Hanson, CP Liberal Leader Stephane Dion is applauded by Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff and other Liberal caucus members during his response to the throne speech yesterday in the House of Commons.

**BYLINE:** ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 462

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He barked, but he didn't bite.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion offered several criticisms of the Conservatives' new legislative plan yesterday, but ultimately said his party will allow it to pass in order to sidestep the first threat of a fall election.

"We will not make the government fall on its throne speech," Dion announced near the end of a 43-minute speech to the Commons.

Even so, he took aim at the lack of action and spending cuts around environmental and climate change initiatives. He also criticized the government for its intention to extend Canada's commitment in Afghanistan to 2011, noting that it fails to specify whether it would continue to be a combat mission.

"If the government wants to transform it into a training mission after 2009, that would be an acceptable option," Dion said.

He went on to state that the government's throne speech failed to address poverty among children and seniors and its lack of progress on reducing medical wait times.

## CONFIDENCE MEASURE

That said, it could have been worse, he remarked.

"It's not as bad as the one we would have heard from the Conservative Party if it had been a majority government," he said.

He was also conciliatory on the Conservative plan to make an omnibus law-and-order bill a confidence measure when it is tabled. Dion said the Liberals supported five of six original bills to be included in the new bill before the Conservatives prorogued Parliament this summer and allowed the bills to die.

In a proposed Liberal amendment, Dion concedes that Canada might not meet its climate change commitments under the Kyoto accord by 2012, but calls on the government to make up for lost time in the international pact's post-2012 phase. The amendment also calls for a clear commitment to end Canada's combat role in Afghanistan as of February 2009.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper made note of Dion's decision to no longer demand Canada reach its Kyoto

targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2012.

"As I listened to the leader of the official Opposition, I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through our term paper, marks all over it everything he disagrees with and then passes us anyway," said Harper.

If the amendments pass, which is unlikely, the Liberals would vote in favour of the throne speech. If they fail, the Liberals will still allow the throne speech to pass by simply abstaining from the vote.

## INTERNAL RIFTS

Dion's decision comes as his party seeks to repair the damage of several internal rifts centred largely on its Quebec wing and plunging popularity in that province.

Earlier in the day, Dion held a long caucus meeting in which several MPs were said to have argued in favour of forcing an election despite the party's troubles.

Grit MPs like Garth Turner (Halton) and Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough–Agincourt) emerged from the caucus meeting with a hawkish view. But both deferred to Dion to make the final decision on whether to force an election.

"The government needs to be brought down," Turner said in the morning.

"This is a defining moment for Stephane Dion," he said later in the day. "It is going to define how he is seen by millions of Canadians and remembered so it is a moment he has to make up his own mind."

KEYWORDS=CANADA

# Throne to the wolves Liberals forced to navigate political minefield as PM threatens early election

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**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON

**WORD COUNT:** 510

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In case there was any doubt how the Conservatives plan to fight the next federal election, their strategy was right there for all to see in the title of last night's throne speech: "Strong leadership. A better Canada."

If Stephen Harper and his strategists have their way, the next election will not be fought on Afghanistan, the economy, getting tough on crime or saving the planet from hot air.

As long as Stephane Dion is heading the Liberal party, the Conservatives will try to make the campaign all about leadership.

The way things are going, it shouldn't be hard to do.

Even as the prime minister was firing up his well-oiled Conservative election machine with last night's throne speech, the Liberals were once again skidding from disunity and disarray straight toward the political ditch.

Two of Dion's key Quebec organizers quit their positions in a huff yesterday, and no one is stepping up to replace them.

Another day, another humiliation for the Liberal leader. And if Harper gets his way, the fun is just beginning for Dion.

While the hapless Grit boss will almost certainly back down from defeating the government and forcing an election race over a throne speech, Canadian politics is now officially a revolving game of chicken between Liberals and Conservatives.

Harper and his team will do what they can to provoke an election. Dion and his crew will have to swallow themselves whole to avoid one.

In keeping with tradition, last night's 16-page drone from the throne was long on platitudes and short on specifics.

Officially billed as the government's agenda for the coming months, the speech was also a cleverly crafted road map into a political minefield for the Liberals.

For instance, the Grits and other opposition parties stalled a number of the Conservative crime-and-punishment bills during the last session, in some cases on a matter of both sound principle and good reason.

Now the Conservatives are making the crime bills an all-or-nothing exercise in brinksmanship, introducing a single piece of legislation that includes all the formerly unpassed draft measures on impaired driving, the age of consent, dangerous offenders, bail reform, and mandatory sentences for gun crimes.

The Liberals will have one vote to either pass all of the proposed new laws at once, or go to the polls having defeated them all. Good luck with that.

Ditto on Afghanistan. The throne speech effectively commits the Conservative government to extending Canada's military mission there to 2011 to train the Afghan army and police.

Aside from making a farce of Harper's recently appointed panel studying the issue, the move also puts a gun to Dion's head.

## PAIN, NO GAIN

Despite public opinion moving toward a withdrawal of Canadian troops in 2009, Dion will either have to meekly back the Conservatives in extending the mission or face an early election.

Aside from providing a glimpse of Liberal pain for Conservative gain in the months to come — if the current Parliament lasts more than weeks — the throne speech also offers a blueprint of the Harper election platform. For example, the Conservatives are promising to woo taxpayers with billions of our own cash with "broad-based tax relief for individuals, businesses and families — including following through on its commitment to a further cut to the GST."

As for the environment, threats such as climate change are now nothing less than "a clear and present danger."

And, of course, the Harper government is promising to come to the aid of children, parents, the elderly and aboriginals, the disabled, the sick, the poor and the not-so-poor.

All in all, the landmines aside, most of the throne speech could have been written by the Liberals, but for one thing: "Our government is committed to strong leadership."

So far, that's something the Liberals can't say. KEYWORDS=FEDERAL GOVERNMENT; CANADA; SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

# Push to extend Afghan mission

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**PAGE:** 5

**BYLINE:** KATHLEEN HARRIS AND ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 228

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MPs must honour the sacrifice of soldiers who died on duty in Afghanistan as they ponder the fate of the military mission, Conservatives urged as they set the stage for two more years in the bloody war zone.

In last night's throne speech, the federal government revealed it will seek Parliament's approval to extend the mission for two more years past the current February 2009 deadline.

"The government does not believe that Canada should simply abandon the people of Afghanistan after February 2009," Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean read in a speech that laid out the Conservatives' fall agenda priorities.

The Liberals and Bloc Québécois have called for the combat mission to end on schedule in 2009, while the NDP has called for an immediate withdrawal of troops.

Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion called the Conservative plan for Afghanistan "ambiguous," while NDP Leader Jack Layton insisted Prime Minister Stephen Harper is leading Canada further down the wrong path in Afghanistan.

"We said that Mr. Harper and the Conservatives had to change direction on the war in Afghanistan. They didn't," he said.

Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe agreed Harper is ignoring the wishes of the Opposition parties by pressing for an extension.

"He's not talking about putting an end to that mission by 2009, they're even talking about 2011, and they're talking about spending more on the military also," he said.

Industry Minister Jim Prentice said the 2011 date marks the expiry of the Afghanistan Compact, and that it should not be taken as the date the government wants to end its role in the country. **KEYWORDS=FEDERAL GOVERNMENT; CANADA; SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

# GG's cutting remarks Speech calls for tax breaks, Afghan extension

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**PAGE:** 4

**ILLUSTRATION:** photo by Tony Caldwell Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean delivers the speech from the throne in the Senate chamber yesterday. The speech promised tax breaks, a stronger presence in the North and Criminal Code reform.

**BYLINE:** KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 739

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The Conservative government will shower Canadians with tax breaks, wave the flag in the North and get tough on young thugs, according to a flurry of promises that could become the launch pad for a fall election.

Amid much pomp and ceremony, Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean delivered a five-pronged federal blueprint that aims to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan by two years and pass a hefty omnibus package of anti-crime measures. In addition to new plans to overhaul the youth justice system and tackle elder abuse, the feds will immediately revive measures on impaired driving, dangerous offenders, bail reform and mandatory prison terms in a single sweeping 'Tackling Violent Crime' bill.

"Canadians expect prompt passage of this crucial legislation," said Jean, reading the speech on behalf of the Conservative government.

## STALLED PASSAGE

Frustrated with the stalled passage of justice bills in the past, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has warned this legislation will be a matter of confidence, which means the government will stand or fall on the crime bills. With that ultimatum, the fate of the federal government hung in doubt last night as the Bloc Québécois and NDP gave the speech thumbs down but the Liberal strategy remained unclear.

The speech also revealed the Conservatives want a new 2011 deadline for the military mission in Afghanistan — two years past the current mandate approved by Parliament. But the proposed extension will be put to a vote in the House of Commons after a blue-ribbon panel reports back with recommendations by February 2008.

"Canada should build on its accomplishments and shift to accelerate the training of the Afghan army and police so that the Afghan government can defend its own sovereignty," Jean read. "This will not be completed by Feb. 2009, but our government believes this objective should be achievable by 2011."

The speech also foreshadowed a series of measures to boost the economy and deliver long-term, broad-based tax relief for individuals, businesses and families. Knocking off another percentage point from the GST is also in the works.

The speech from the throne also pledged to strengthen Canada's Arctic sovereignty by promoting an economic and social development plan and building a "world-class" Arctic research station to foster environmental

science and resource development.

"Defending our sovereignty in the North also demands that we maintain the capacity to act," the speech read. "New Arctic patrol ships and expanded aerial surveillance will guard Canada's Far North and the Northwest Passage. As well, the size and capabilities of the Arctic Rangers will be expanded to better patrol our vast Arctic territory."

The Conservatives also pledged strong steps to green the environment and slash greenhouse gases, but made clear that Canada will not meet its Kyoto targets on emissions.

"It is now widely understood that because of inaction on greenhouse gases over the last decade, Canada's emissions can not be brought to the level required under the Kyoto Protocol within the compliance period," Jean read.

## INTERNAL TURMOIL

The speech from the throne was delivered just hours after news of more internal turmoil in the Opposition Liberal ranks. Leader Stephane Dion was on the prowl for a new Quebec lieutenant after losing Gatineau MP Marcel Proulx, who quit as Dion's captain in the province after learning his job had been offered behind his back to Montreal MP Denis Coderre. Coderre rejected the offer, leaving Dion scrambling for a replacement and the party in further disarray.

The party leaders will begin debate on the throne speech in the House of Commons today.

If the speech is defeated in a confidence vote, Prime Minister Stephen Harper will hit the campaign trail in pursuit of a majority and use the document as the backbone of his election platform.

If it survives, Harper has already declared that he expects a freer rein in imposing his agenda on Parliament and is prepared to use the threat of confidence votes to make it happen.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- A fall economic update will outline plans to cut taxes across the board, including a further one-percentage-point cut to the GST.
  - A Tackling Violent Crime bill will include measures on impaired driving, age of sexual consent, stricter bail conditions, and mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.
  - Canada cannot meet its commitments to cut greenhouse gases under the Kyoto Protocol, but will "help lead the effort" to address climate change worldwide.
  - There will be a parliamentary vote on the military mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009. Canada should accelerate Afghan army and police training — a job it says should be done by 2011.
  - Legislation is coming to limit federal spending power for new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.
  - The government will build a "world-class" Arctic research station to study environmental science and resource development, and to map the Arctic seabed in an effort to bolster Canada's claim to the Arctic.
- KEYWORDS=FEDERAL GOVERNMENT; CANADA; SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

# Liberals criticize speech, but steer clear of vote call

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**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Sun

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**PAGE:** 4

**ILLUSTRATION:** 1. photo of STEPHANE DION No standoff 2. photo of GILLES DUCEPPE Vote against

**BYLINE:** ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 180

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No election — for now.

With the fate of this fall's parliamentary session on his shoulders, Opposition Liberal Leader Stephane Dion signalled that his party will work to avoid a legislative standoff that could trigger a nationwide trip to the polls in the coming weeks.

"Canadians want, as a priority for this Parliament, to work," Dion told reporters in a brief statement last night. "They don't want a third election in three years and a half."

Dion said his party anticipated it would have criticisms with the speech, such as a "complete and shocking indifference about poverty," a weak environment plan and a perceived ambiguity on Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

Both the NDP and Bloc Quebecois leaders were announcing their opposition to the speech even before the Governor General had finished reading it.

"This speech from the throne is so far off track that we fail to see how it can possibly be salvaged with any tweaking here and there," said New Democrat Leader Jack Layton.

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe said the speech fails to address all but one of five items his party had demanded to be addressed last night.

"We'll vote against that, certainly," he said.

He cited the Afghanistan mission's proposed extension to 2011 and the rejection of Canada's climate change commitments under the Kyoto accord as unsupportable. **KEYWORDS=FEDERAL GOVERNMENT; CANADA; SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

# House must still vote

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**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
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**SECTION:** Editorial / Op-Ed  
**PAGE:** A22  
**KEYWORDS:** 0  
**SOURCE:** The Gazette  
**WORD COUNT:** 65

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Re: "PM's panel deftly neutralizes Afghan war" (Editorial, Oct. 15).

Appointing an advisory panel on Afghanistan might be a skilful move, but it can still short-change the House of Commons' elected representatives.

While the panel conducts its work within the parameters of its prime ministerial mandate, the fall session of the House should, in parallel, debate our involvement in Afghanistan and vote on this issue.

Hussain Syed

Brossard

# Few Liberals keen on fall campaign; Dion backs off from election over throne speech

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**PUBLICATION:** Montreal Gazette  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A1 / FRONT  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Colour Photo: CHRIS WATTIE, REUTERS / STANDING OVATION Deputy Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff applauds Stéphane Dion as the opposition leader responds to the Speech from the Throne yesterday in the House of Commons. ; Photo: CHRIS WATTIE, REUTERS / Liberal leader Stéphane Dion gets a standing ovation while responding to the Throne Speech yesterday. ;  
**KEYWORDS:** ELECTIONS; POLITICAL PARTIES; POLITICIANS; CANDIDATES; GOVERNMENT; UNITED STATES; VOTING  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** JULIET O'NEILL and NORMA GREENAWAY  
**SOURCE:** CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 713

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Liberal leader Stéphane Dion threw cold water on election fever in the Commons yesterday, saying the official opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the Throne Speech.

After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Dion announced the Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected next Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the Tories. The Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democrats and the Bloc Québécois have stated they intend to vote against the Throne Speech.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official opposition, Dion noted the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberal government in power.

"We will propose amendments but we will not make the government fall on the Throne Speech, which would cause the third general election in four years – something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Dion said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the Throne Speech, they will have to also pass the laws that flow from it. NDP leader Jack Layton suggested Dion is a weak leader who doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election while the Liberals continue to struggle with internal turmoil over Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials and continued fallout from recent by-election losses in Quebec.

In their response to the Throne Speech, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to come to a vote Monday.

The first vote on the Throne Speech is due tonight on a Bloc sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP, because it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

The NDP has repeatedly called for the immediate withdrawal of troops, and the government said in the Throne Speech that it prefers a training program that would last until 2011.

The amendment also calls for an anti-poverty plan, which Dion said "will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda." And it calls for corporate tax reductions – which the government did promise in the Throne Speech – and other measures to improve the economy.

Harper accused the Liberals and other opposition parties of dragging their feet for months on a range of law-and-order bills introduced in the last session, and said he won't allow that to happen again.

The prime minister announced that the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, will be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government will not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

The package will combine bills that would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The Liberals have not ruled out supporting the omnibus package, which could come before the Commons for debate as early as next week.

Several Liberal officials said Dion is willing to hit the campaign trail but listened to those around him who urged him to let the government govern. They also said he is strong enough to take the criticism that will come with propping up the government.

"Everyone underestimates Mr. Dion," Ottawa MP David

McGuinty told reporters. "That is the hallmark of his political career. This is not over."

One of the few Liberal MPs who argued for defeat of the government was Jim Karygiannis of Toronto.

"Punch me in the face and I'll punch back," he told reporters. He conceded it's easy for him to talk tough as he has a huge plurality and would easily win his seat again.

# Weary Grits wave white flag at Tory throne speech

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**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A4  
**COLUMN:** Calgary's Eye on National Politics  
**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** Don Martin  
**SOURCE:** Calgary Herald  
**WORD COUNT:** 733

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Liberal leader Stephane Dion looked out over his brooding caucus Wednesday morning and saw dead people — dozens of MPs bracing for their forced march into an electoral Jonestown where tombstones would be the final result.

That's when he knew there could be no retreat with honour, only the indignity of Dion's unconditional surrender to a "hyper-Conservative platform" that may yet form the basis for his bitter rival's next campaign.

The speech from the throne will pass intact next week with the once-proud Liberals sitting in the stony silence of absentia, but safe from an Armageddonesque judgment day at the polls.

A theme for this Parliament has now been set. Canada's official Opposition is but a government whack-a-mole game with Prime Minister Stephen Harper using the election hammer to knock them down every time they raise their heads.

It makes you wonder why sources are telling me the Conservatives are firing up yet-another series of television ads to celebrate themselves and ridicule their flailing opponent. It's clearly overkill of a twitching corpse.

The proof of Dion's dire straits echoed across the hall where those with a keen ear Wednesday morning would've heard ecstatic Conservatives giving Prime Minister Stephen Harper five cheering ovations inside of five minutes, including one slightly sarcastic version for media briefly allowed into the room.

When Dion rose in the House of Commons three hours later, he got a standing ovation too, but one suspects it was a show of relief from MPs who had just heard their leader delay their demise.

The duelling contrast between Dion and Harper in style and substance during the throne speech aftermath could not have been more tellingly distinct.

Dion, his eyes glued to his text, spoke in a flat voice devoid of passion or genuine commitment — which befits someone dining on a smorgasbord of political crow.

Harper grinned gleefully during his rival's reading ceremony, making notes he would use to stray from his script while poking fun at Dion's pretzel-like ability to grade the Conservatives so poorly on many key areas in the speech while ultimately issuing it a passing grade.

In matters of substance, Dion argued delaying an election Canada doesn't want and making Parliament work trumped his party's obligation to defend the downtrodden, push to end the Afghanistan combat mission on schedule in 2009 and maintain Canada's Kyoto commitment to greenhouse gas reduction.

Harper, emboldened by the white flags he saw flapping across the aisle, shrugged it all off, declared his omnibus crime bill bulletproof from any amendment and warned a repeat of the Senate's obstructionism could have drastic consequences.

"If the Senate cannot reform, I think most Canadians also eventually conclude that it should be abolished," he warned. That's constitutionally improbable, but . . . ouch.

The Conservative benches greeted all this with the predictable howls and heckles at Dion squirming to justify support for a speech that will ultimately turn the government's blueprint into a Liberal-embraced redbook.

The Conservatives know they are not only safely re-elected should an accidental vote be triggered, but remain in firm control of their destiny despite sitting as a relatively weak minority government.

One Liberal's reaction was particularly telling. When all other MPs rose to celebrate a rare good jab in Dion's address, deputy leader Michael Ignatieff seemed to stay in his seat most of the time. I'm not sure whether this was a sudden attack of leg cramps or the opening shot of a leadership challenge, but the optic was hard to miss.

Perhaps the strangest argument submitted by Dion for his actions was to reason that an official Opposition was vital to defend Canada from the allegedly scary unilateralism of a Conservative majority which, he warned, would've produced a hard-right manifesto had the Liberals not stood on guard for thee.

Pray tell how governing with a fetal-position Opposition is any different from majority rule?

Now, now, Liberal insiders insist, a fall election is still a real possibility. They predict the Conservatives will find a way to insert a devilish detail into a piece of future legislation that will force them over the abyss, a plunge they are willing to take even if it's to many Liberal deaths. Perhaps that's possible. After all, they can't surrender forever.

But if a Kyoto-killing, Afghanistan mission-extending, hard-punishing, federalism-limiting agenda that met none of the litmus tests for acceptance by Stephane Dion just a month ago is allowed to pass by the Liberals, it's hard to imagine any mere detail sending Canada to the polls.

Unless the Liberals recover their footing, Parliament appears to have elected a majority Conservative government in legislative power if not in democratic seats.

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# Grits back down on election threat

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**IDNUMBER** 200710180004  
**PUBLICATION:** Calgary Herald  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Early  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A1 / FRONT  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Photo: Chris Wattie, Reuters / Liberal Leader Stephane Dion will support the Conservative throne speech next week and avoid a non-confidence vote. ;  
**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill and Norma Greenaway  
**SOURCE:** CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 612

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Liberal Leader Stephane Dion threw cold water on election fever in the Commons on Wednesday, saying the official Opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Dion announced the Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected next Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government.

The Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois have already said they intend to vote against the throne speech.

"We will propose amendments, but we will not make the government fall on the throne speech, which would cause the third general election in four years -- something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Dion said.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Dion noted the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberals in power.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the throne speech they will have to also pass the laws that flow from it. NDP leader Jack Layton suggested Dion is a weak leader who doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election while the Liberals continue to struggle with internal turmoil over Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials, and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

In their response to the speech from the throne, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to come to a vote Monday.

The first vote on the throne speech is due tonight on a Bloc Quebecois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

The NDP has repeatedly called for the immediate withdrawal of troops and the government said in the throne speech that while Parliament will vote on the future of the mission, it prefers a training program that would last until 2011.

In their amendment, the Liberals blame the government for failing to meet the first stage of targets under the Kyoto accord on climate change and call for a catch-up plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the second phase.

The amendment also calls for an anti-poverty plan, which Dion said "will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda." And it calls for corporate tax reductions — which the government did promise in the throne speech — and other measures to improve the economy.

Harper came out swinging against the Opposition, warning that they cannot allow the throne speech to pass and then "obstruct our core priorities."

He cited a promised sweeping anti-crime bill as the government's top priority for the new parliamentary session, and he shrugged off Dion's criticism of the speech as posturing.

"As I listened to the leader of the Opposition, he reminded me a little bit of a professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with, but then passes you anyway."

# Master of disaster Dion shows why he'll lead the Liberals to electoral annihilation

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180279  
**PUBLICATION:** The Ottawa Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** Editorial/Opinion  
**PAGE:** 15  
**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON  
**COLUMN:** National Affairs  
**WORD COUNT:** 504

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Just as this week's throne speech gave us a taste of the Conservative campaign to come, Stephane Dion's response to it yesterday showcased all the reasons the Liberals are staring at almost certain electoral disaster.

Let's start with the leader.

Rising in the Commons for his keynote address, Dion managed to turn an already badly written speech into 43 minutes of audio hell, his message utterly lost in his staccato delivery of mangled English pronunciation.

Adding to the annals of great moments in parliamentary oratory, Dion gave us memorable lines such as: "Let me turn my intention now to the more problematic issue."

'SLAP IN THE FATE'

The Conservative policies on the environment, we're sure he said, are "a slap in the fate."

Seated on the Commons frontbench next to the Liberal leader, his wannabe successor Michael Ignatieff spent most of Dion's speech looking as though he couldn't decide whether to nap or cry.

In an election campaign, there isn't a meeting hall in the country that Dion couldn't empty with a stump speech even half as bad as his pitch to Parliament.

In the pivotal televised leaders' debates, he would have an entire nation lunging for their channel changers.

All of which wouldn't be quite so fatal if the Liberal leader actually had something enlightening to say on his party's policies, even if he has trouble saying it.

Instead, Dion opened yesterday's critique of the Conservative throne speech with a grim and dire warning to all Canadians about – wait for it – Harper's hidden agenda that would befall the nation if the Tories were to win a majority in the next election.

The work of our police officers and the safety of our citizens would be threatened by the absolute dismantling of the gun registry, and our environment would be neglected," Dion predicted to much howling from the Tory benches.

Rural economies would be threatened," he continued, and "health care would be subject to an agenda of Conservative radical reform. We can imagine what that means."

Scary stuff, indeed.

As for all those election tripwires that Harper and his strategists have set for the Liberals in the hopes of triggering an election, Dion stopped barely short of running through the Commons waving a white flag.

## CRIME BILL

For instance, the Conservatives will be introducing an omnibus crime bill that includes all six pieces of law-and-order legislation that were stalled in the Commons mill, and died with the last session of Parliament.

Harper has told the Liberals to take it or leave it — pass it all, or go into an election.

Dion's response? "We obviously want to see exactly what the legislation will say. We could support it if (it) includes measures that would make Canadians safer. We Liberals are tough on crime and we are tough on the causes of crime."

Dion showed equal toughness on Afghanistan, calling on Harper's administration to "immediately notify NATO and the Government of Afghanistan that our combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009."

That said, the Conservative plan to extend the mission until 2011 to train Afghan troops and police is just hunky-dory with the Liberal leader.

Like all great epics in oratory, Dion saved the best for last.

The Liberals may have an ineffective leader and not much in the way of an election platform, but by golly they have a strategy to show the country what they are really made of.

"To conclude, the official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech," Dion said as a tense hush fell on the Commons.

Therefore, the Liberals are proposing sweeping amendments to the Conservative throne speech, he announced.

And if those don't pass, well then a Liberal party led by Stephane Dion will avoid an election by not voting at all.

The good news is the latest poll shows there are still 12% of Canadians who think Dion would make the best prime minister.

# 'Losing in Afghanistan' Ex-UN envoy: Dire consequences if it continues

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**SOURCETAG:** 0710180268  
**PUBLICATION:** The Ottawa Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 6  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of PADDY ASHDOWN Former MP  
**BYLINE:** REUTERS  
**DATELINE:** BRUSSELS  
**COLUMN:** World Watch  
**WORD COUNT:** 254

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International forces are unlikely to win their battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan, risking a regional conflict that could match the magnitude of previous world wars, a former top UN envoy said yesterday.

Lord Paddy Ashdown — former UN high representative and European Union special representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina — said that failure by the NATO-led force would have far wider repercussions than any losses in Iraq.

He called for the appointment of a high-level coordinator to lead the foreign mission in Afghanistan.

"I think we are losing in Afghanistan now, we have lost I think and success is now unlikely," he said in an interview.

"I believe losing in Afghanistan is worse than losing in Iraq.

"It will mean that Pakistan will fall and it will have serious implications internally for the security of our own countries and will instigate a wider Shiite, Sunni regional war on a grand scale."

"Some people refer to the First and Second World Wars as European civil wars and I think a similar regional civil war could be initiated by this (failure) to match this magnitude," Ashdown added.

The number of Taliban suicide attacks in Afghanistan — more than 100 so far this year — is set to top last year's record of 123, the UN says, and most victims are civilians.

The Taliban have increased the number of suicide attacks after suffering heavy casualties in conventional clashes with foreign forces and the Afghan army, security analysts say.

While Western forces, alongside the Afghan army, have claimed victories against Taliban rebels in the south, many remote areas and some towns remain under rebel control and insurgent attacks have also spread north to regions previously considered safe.

Frustration with the government over the slow pace of development, official corruption and the lack of law and order have all played into rebel hands.

Ashdown is a former British Liberal Party leader. KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Liberals to stand down

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180266

**PUBLICATION:** The Ottawa Sun

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**EDITION:** Final

**SECTION:** News

**PAGE:** 5

**ILLUSTRATION:** photo by Tom Hanson, CP Liberal Leader Stephane Dion is applauded by Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff and other Liberal caucus members during his response to the throne speech yesterday in the House of Commons.

**BYLINE:** ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 462

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He barked, but he didn't bite.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion offered several criticisms of the Conservatives' new legislative plan yesterday, but ultimately said his party will allow it to pass in order to sidestep the first threat of a fall election.

"We will not make the government fall on its throne speech," Dion announced near the end of a 43-minute speech to the Commons.

Even so, he took aim at the lack of action and spending cuts around environmental and climate change initiatives. He also criticized the government for its intention to extend Canada's commitment in Afghanistan to 2011, noting that it fails to specify whether it would continue to be a combat mission.

"If the government wants to transform it into a training mission after 2009, that would be an acceptable option," Dion said.

He went on to state that the government's throne speech failed to address poverty among children and seniors and its lack of progress on reducing medical wait times.

## CONFIDENCE MEASURE

That said, it could have been worse, he remarked.

"It's not as bad as the one we would have heard from the Conservative Party if it had been a majority government," he said.

He was also conciliatory on the Conservative plan to make an omnibus law-and-order bill a confidence measure when it is tabled. Dion said the Liberals supported five of six original bills to be included in the new bill before the Conservatives prorogued Parliament this summer and allowed the bills to die.

In a proposed Liberal amendment, Dion concedes that Canada might not meet its climate change commitments under the Kyoto accord by 2012, but calls on the government to make up for lost time in the international pact's post-2012 phase. The amendment also calls for a clear commitment to end Canada's combat role in Afghanistan as of February 2009.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper made note of Dion's decision to no longer demand Canada reach its Kyoto

targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2012.

"As I listened to the leader of the official Opposition, I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through our term paper, marks all over it everything he disagrees with and then passes us anyway," said Harper.

If the amendments pass, which is unlikely, the Liberals would vote in favour of the throne speech. If they fail, the Liberals will still allow the throne speech to pass by simply abstaining from the vote.

## INTERNAL RIFTS

Dion's decision comes as his party seeks to repair the damage of several internal rifts centred largely on its Quebec wing and plunging popularity in that province.

Earlier in the day, Dion held a long caucus meeting in which several MPs were said to have argued in favour of forcing an election despite the party's troubles.

Grit MPs like Garth Turner (Halton) and Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough–Agincourt) emerged from the caucus meeting with a hawkish view. But both deferred to Dion to make the final decision on whether to force an election.

"The government needs to be brought down," Turner said in the morning.

"This is a defining moment for Stephane Dion," he said later in the day. "It is going to define how he is seen by millions of Canadians and remembered so it is a moment he has to make up his own mind."

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

# Crime fight tops agenda Harper urges opposition MPs to pass omnibus law-and-order bill 'in days'

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**SOURCETAG:** 0710180265

**PUBLICATION:** The Ottawa Sun

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**EDITION:** Final

**SECTION:** News

**PAGE:** 5

**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of STEPHEN HARPER Won't tolerate stalling tactics

**BYLINE:** KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 291

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Dangerous criminals are loose on the streets because of lax laws that opposition MPs have been loath to help fix, Prime Minister Stephen Harper charged yesterday.

Urging opposition MPs to pass an omnibus crime-busting bill "in days," the PM warned he will not tolerate stalling tactics from the Liberals.

While six of 13 crime bills were held up last session, Harper all but assured swift passage of the Tackling Violent Crime Act by banning substantial amendments and making it a confidence vote.

The omnibus crime package will resurrect legislation that did not pass in the last session of Parliament -- on dangerous offenders, impaired drivers, bail reform, prison terms for gun crimes and raising the age of protection to fend off Internet child predators.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion insisted his party strongly supports victims and signalled his party is open to passing the crime package. But he flatly rejected another key throne speech pledge on Afghanistan, demanding the government immediately notify NATO that Canada will end its combat role in Kandahar in February 2009.

## 'ENORMOUS SACRIFICES'

Harper, who wants to prolong the mission by two years to 2011, insisted the Afghanistan role is "noble and necessary" and at the heart of Canada's foreign policy.

"We cannot understate the responsibilities we have undertaken to the Afghan people, to the international community and to the men and women of our diplomatic, development and defence forces who have made such enormous sacrifices on behalf of all of us," he said.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe accused Harper of trying to buy time by appointing the blue-ribbon panel of "pawns" to study the issue.

"He decided to create a committee to deceive the public," Duceppe said.

Steve Staples, director of the Rideau Institute, believes Harper has been "emboldened" to extend the mission by recent byelection results and the chance to exploit divisions in Liberal ranks.

"It's worrisome, because any extension of this mission unchanged is simply going to mean billions more dollars being spent and a lot more caskets coming home," he said. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

# Master of disaster Dion shows why he'll lead the Liberals to electoral annihilation.

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180704  
**PUBLICATION:** The London Free Press  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** Editorial/Opinion  
**PAGE:** A13  
**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON  
**WORD COUNT:** 500

---

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The good news is the latest poll shows there are still 12 per cent of Canadians who think Dion would make the best prime minister.

# Harper warns Opposition not to stall new crime bills

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180697

**PUBLICATION:** The London Free Press

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

**EDITION:** Final

**SECTION:** News

**PAGE:** A12

**BYLINE:** KATHLEEN HARRIS, SUN MEDIA NATIONAL BUREAU

**DATELINE:** OTTAWA

**WORD COUNT:** 287

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While six of 13 crime bills were held up last session, Harper all but assured swift passage of the Tackling Violent Crime Act by banning substantial amendments and making it a confidence vote.

The prime minister said Canadians are tired of hearing horror stories about repeat convicts committing violent attacks when they should be locked up behind bars.

"Each time they do, Canadians look at their record, their rap sheet, and ask, 'Why on Earth was this person let out of prison?' There is nothing more unacceptable than that," he said.

The omnibus crime package will resurrect legislation that did not pass in the last session of Parliament -- on dangerous offenders, impaired drivers, bail reform, prison terms for gun crimes and raising the age of protection to fend off Internet child predators.

For too long, Harper said Canada's justice system has favoured criminals.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion insisted his party strongly supports victims and signalled his party is open to passing the crime package.

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"He decided to create a committee to deceive the public," he said. "It's out of the question to trust the prime minister on this issue." KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

# There'll be no vote Liberals won't topple government over throne speech

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180665  
**PUBLICATION:** The London Free Press  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A1  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo by Tom Hanson, CP IN THE COMMONS: Liberal Leader Stephane Dion and Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff  
**BYLINE:** ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**WORD COUNT:** 454

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Even so, he took aim at the lack of action, and spending cuts, around environmental and climate change initiatives.

He also criticized the government for its intention to extend Canada's commitment in Afghanistan to 2011, noting that it fails to specify whether it would continue to be a combat mission.

"If the government wants to transform it into a training mission after 2009, that would be an acceptable option," Dion said.

He went on to state that the government's throne speech failed to address poverty among children and seniors alike and its lack of progress on reducing medical wait times.

That said, it could have been worse, Dion remarked.

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The amendment also calls for a clear commitment to end to Canada's combat role in Afghanistan as of February 2009.

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Dion's decision comes as his party seeks to repair the damage of several internal rifts centred largely on its Quebec wing and plummeting popularity in that province.

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"This is a defining moment for Stephane Dion," he said later in the day. "It is going to define how he is seen by millions of Canadians and remembered so it is a moment he has to make up his own mind."

Toronto Don Valley West MP John Godfrey, Ottawa South MP David McGuinty and others took a more conciliatory wait-and-see position after emerging from the caucus meeting. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

# 'Losing in Afghanistan' Ex-UN envoy: Dire consequences if it continues

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**SOURCETAG:** 0710180587  
**PUBLICATION:** The Edmonton Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 23  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of PADDY ASHDOWN Former MP  
**BYLINE:** REUTERS  
**DATELINE:** BRUSSELS  
**WORD COUNT:** 254

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# Liberals to stand down

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**SOURCETAG** 0710180585

**PUBLICATION:** The Edmonton Sun

**DATE:** 2007.10.18

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**SECTION:** News

**PAGE:** 20

**ILLUSTRATION:** photo by Tom Hanson, CP Liberal Leader Stephane Dion is applauded by Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff and other Liberal caucus members during his response to the throne speech yesterday in the House of Commons.

**BYLINE:** ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

**WORD COUNT:** 457

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**PUBLICATION:** The Edmonton Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** Editorial/Opinion  
**PAGE:** 11  
**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON  
**COLUMN:** National Affairs  
**WORD COUNT:** 504

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Just as this week's throne speech gave us a taste of the Conservative campaign to come, Stephane Dion's response to it yesterday showcased all the reasons the Liberals are staring at almost certain electoral disaster.

Let's start with the leader.

Rising in the Commons for his keynote address, Dion managed to turn an already badly written speech into 43 minutes of audio hell, his message utterly lost in his staccato delivery of mangled English pronunciation.

Adding to the annals of great moments in parliamentary oratory, Dion gave us memorable lines such as: "Let me turn my intention now to the more problematic issue."

'SLAP IN THE FATE'

The Conservative policies on the environment, we're sure he said, are "a slap in the fate."

Seated on the Commons frontbench next to the Liberal leader, his wannabe successor Michael Ignatieff spent most of Dion's speech looking as though he couldn't decide whether to nap or cry.

In an election campaign, there isn't a meeting hall in the country that Dion couldn't empty with a stump speech even half as bad as his pitch to Parliament.

In the pivotal televised leaders' debates, he would have an entire nation lunging for their channel changers.

All of which wouldn't be quite so fatal if the Liberal leader actually had something enlightening to say on his party's policies, even if he has trouble saying it.

Instead, Dion opened yesterday's critique of the Conservative throne speech with a grim and dire warning to all Canadians about – wait for it – Harper's hidden agenda that would befall the nation if the Tories were to win a majority in the next election.

The work of our police officers and the safety of our citizens would be threatened by the absolute dismantling of the gun registry, and our environment would be neglected," Dion predicted to much howling from the Tory benches.

Rural economies would be threatened," he continued, and "health care would be subject to an agenda of Conservative radical reform. We can imagine what that means."

Scary stuff, indeed.

As for all those election tripwires that Harper and his strategists have set for the Liberals in the hopes of triggering an election, Dion stopped barely short of running through the Commons waving a white flag.

## CRIME BILL

For instance, the Conservatives will be introducing an omnibus crime bill that includes all six pieces of law-and-order legislation that were stalled in the Commons mill, and died with the last session of Parliament.

Harper has told the Liberals to take it or leave it — pass it all, or go into an election.

Dion's response? "We obviously want to see exactly what the legislation will say. We could support it if (it) includes measures that would make Canadians safer. We Liberals are tough on crime and we are tough on the causes of crime."

Dion showed equal toughness on Afghanistan, calling on Harper's administration to "immediately notify NATO and the Government of Afghanistan that our combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009."

That said, the Conservative plan to extend the mission until 2011 to train Afghan troops and police is just hunky-dory with the Liberal leader.

Like all great epics in oratory, Dion saved the best for last.

The Liberals may have an ineffective leader and not much in the way of an election platform, but by golly they have a strategy to show the country what they are really made of.

"To conclude, the official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech," Dion said as a tense hush fell on the Commons.

Therefore, the Liberals are proposing sweeping amendments to the Conservative throne speech, he announced.

And if those don't pass, well then a Liberal party led by Stephane Dion will avoid an election by not voting at all.

The good news is the latest poll shows there are still 12% of Canadians who think Dion would make the best prime minister.

# Master of disaster Dion shows why he'll lead the Liberals to electoral annihilation

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**PUBLICATION:** The Calgary Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
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**PAGE:** 15  
**BYLINE:** GREG WESTON, NATIONAL AFFAIRS  
**WORD COUNT:** 506

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# Letters to the Editor Column

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**COLUMN:** Letters to the Editor  
**WORD COUNT:** 616

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## VOTE COUNTING LABOUR INTENSIVE

As a semi-retired gentleman of leisure, I worked as a deputy returning officer for the municipal election on Oct 15. We live in a world ruled by electronics; banking, shopping, communicating, gaming and researching are all done electronically. After experiencing the voting and vote counting processes from behind the scenes, I cannot help but marvel how archaic and error prone the process is. Only the dedication and effort put in over many hours of those hired to work produce results that are able to be trusted. Surely there is an electronic solution to the election process that could be shared by federal, provincial and municipal governments that would eliminate all of the hours of manual labour. I know I would like to be able to log on and vote from home.

Pete Whitehead

(That'd improve the vote count.)

## BRIEF FROM PRIVY COUNCIL

RE: Greg Weston's Oct. 16 column stating government documents "reveal substantial plans" to create a new prime ministerial briefing centre. Since we didn't receive a call from Weston for comment, I am writing to clarify. Due to its proximity to our offices, the Privy Council Office looked at the vacant space in question for several possible uses. Preliminary analysis was done in 2006 and last fall, at an early stage, it was decided for a variety of factors -- accessibility and cost -- not to proceed. The PCO is not proceeding with this initiative and this decision was taken a year ago.

Marilyn MacPherson

Privy Council Office

(Thanks for setting the record straight.)

## PUT ISSUES ON BALLOT

Once again we have a shallow turnout for the civic election and once again there will be moaning about how "if you don't vote you have no right to complain." My wife and I voted because we felt it was the right thing to do, but we knew it would have no influence on whether Dave Bronconnier or Ric McIver were re-elected. Had there been several referendum items on the ballot, such as "should civic vehicles display yellow ribbons supporting our troops," and "should the city develop mobile home parks to ease the affordable housing crisis," we could have participated in real democracy. Media interest would have been higher, and the voter turnout much different.

John H. MacLean

(Right. Give the people a say on important issues.)

#### BUNNY SOLUTION SERVED UP

Re: "Feverishly multiplying bunnies taking over Valley Ridge" (Oct. 16). Here's an idea, serve them with some roast potatoes and vegetables. A nice meal and they should be plump with all the eating they've been doing.

Marty Kneller

(We have a feeling the animal lovers are going to roast you.)

#### THRONE SPEECH EARNS KUDOS

Having listened to the throne speech, I must say Stephen Harper has done a great job with the policies the Conservatives stand for (lower taxes, tough on crime, supporting our troops and the mission in Afghanistan). As a proud Canadian, I'm proud of Harper and the direction he wants to take my country. The throne speech comments made by Jack Layton, Gilles Duceppe and Stephane Dion have been a total embarrassment. If an election were held today, I would vote Conservative, hands down

Steve Martin

Toronto

(Tory support is on the rise.)

#### BRONCO'S BACKING SOLID

Donald K. Munroe's Oct. 17 letter doesn't make sense. He claims 61% of the vote for Bronconnier was not a convincing victory when only 33% of eligible voters made it to the polls. What this actually means is voter complacency and that the 67% of eligible voters who did not vote are OK with Dave or indifferent. The people who really wanted change must have voted and it's plain to see there were not really that many. It's very clear, unless of course, you only got 61% on your report card.

Craig Conrad

(Ouch.)

# 'Losing in Afghanistan' Ex-UN envoy: Dire consequences if it continues

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**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
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**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of PADDY ASHDOWN Former MP  
**BYLINE:** REUTERS  
**DATELINE:** BRUSSELS  
**WORD COUNT:** 254

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International forces are unlikely to win their battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan, risking a regional conflict that could match the magnitude of previous world wars, a former top UN envoy said yesterday.

Lord Paddy Ashdown — former UN high representative and European Union special representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina — said that failure by the NATO-led force would have far wider repercussions than any losses in Iraq.

He called for the appointment of a high-level coordinator to lead the foreign mission in Afghanistan.

"I think we are losing in Afghanistan now, we have lost I think and success is now unlikely," he said in an interview.

"I believe losing in Afghanistan is worse than losing in Iraq.

"It will mean that Pakistan will fall and it will have serious implications internally for the security of our own countries and will instigate a wider Shiite, Sunni regional war on a grand scale."

"Some people refer to the First and Second World Wars as European civil wars and I think a similar regional civil war could be initiated by this (failure) to match this magnitude," Ashdown added.

The number of Taliban suicide attacks in Afghanistan — more than 100 so far this year — is set to top last year's record of 123, the UN says, and most victims are civilians.

The Taliban have increased the number of suicide attacks after suffering heavy casualties in conventional clashes with foreign forces and the Afghan army, security analysts say.

While Western forces, alongside the Afghan army, have claimed victories against Taliban rebels in the south, many remote areas and some towns remain under rebel control and insurgent attacks have also spread north to regions previously considered safe.

Frustration with the government over the slow pace of development, official corruption and the lack of law and order have all played into rebel hands.

Ashdown is a former British Liberal Party leader. KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Liberals back down Won't topple government

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**PUBLICATION:** The Calgary Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 7

**ILLUSTRATION:** photo by Tom Hanson, CP Liberal Leader Stephane Dion is applauded by deputy leader Michael Ignatieff and other caucus members during his response to the throne speech in the Commons yesterday. Dion said he won't force the minority Tory government to topple, thus avoiding a fall election.

**BYLINE:** ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**WORD COUNT:** 279

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He barked, but he didn't bite.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion criticized the Conservatives' new legislative plan yesterday, but ultimately said his party will allow it to pass to sidestep the first threat of a fall election.

"We will not make the government fall on its throne speech," Dion announced near the end of a 43-minute speech to the Commons.

Even so, he took aim at the lack of action, and spending cuts, around environmental and climate change.

He also criticized the government for its intention to extend Canada's commitment in Afghanistan to 2011, noting it fails to specify whether it would continue to be a combat mission.

"If the government wants to transform it into a training mission after 2009, that would be an acceptable option," Dion said.

He went on to state that the government's throne speech failed to address poverty among children and seniors, and lack of progress on medical wait times.

That said, it could have been worse, he remarked.

"It's not as bad as the one we would have heard from the Conservative Party if it had been a majority government."

He was also conciliatory to the Conservative plan to make a omnibus law-and-order bill a confidence measure when it is tabled soon. Dion said the Liberals supported five of six original bills to be included in the new bill before the Conservatives prorogued Parliament this summer and the bills died.

In a proposed Liberal amendment, Dion concedes Canada may not meet its climate change commitments under the Kyoto Accord by 2012, but calls on the government to make up for lost time in the international agreement's second, post-2012 phase.

The amendment also calls for a clear commitment to end Canada's combat role in Afghanistan as of February 2009.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper made note of Dion's decision to no longer demand Canada reach its Kyoto targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2012.

"As I listened to the leader of the official Opposition, I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through our term paper, marks all over it everything he disagrees with and then passes us anyway," said Harper. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

# Grits won't topple Tories; Let Parliament do job, Dion says

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**IDNUMBER** 200710180004  
**PUBLICATION:** The Windsor Star  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** A1 / FRONT  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill and Norma Greenaway  
**SOURCE:** CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 740

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OTTAWA – Liberal Leader Stephane Dion threw cold water on election fever in the Commons Wednesday, saying the official Opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against an election, Dion announced the Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The vote is expected Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government.

Currently, the Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois have already stated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Dion noted that the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberal government in power.

"We will propose amendments but we will not make the government fall on the throne speech, which would cause the third general election in four years -- something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Dion said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the throne speech they will have to also pass the laws that flow from it. NDP leader Jack Layton suggested Dion is a weak leader who doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election while the Liberals continue to struggle with internal turmoil over Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials, and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

In their response to the speech from the throne, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to come to a vote Monday.

The first vote on the throne speech is due tonight on a Bloc Quebecois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

The NDP has repeatedly called for the immediate withdrawal of troops and the government said in the throne speech that while Parliament will vote on the future of the mission, it prefers a training program that would last until 2011.

In their amendment, the Liberals blame the government for failing to meet the first stage of targets under the Kyoto accord on climate change and call for a catch-up plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the second phase.

The amendment also calls for an anti-poverty plan, which Dion said "will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda." And it calls for corporate tax reductions — which the government did promise in the throne speech — and other measures to improve the economy.

Layton suggested that Dion showed weak leadership by not voting to bring down the government to put a stop to its Conservative policies.

Harper came out swinging against the opposition, warning that they cannot allow the throne speech to pass and then "obstruct our core priorities."

He cited a promised sweeping anti-crime bill as the government's top priority for the new parliamentary session, and he shrugged off Dion's criticism of the speech as posturing.

"As I listened to the leader of the Opposition, he reminded me a little bit of a professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with, but then passes you anyway."

The prime minister announced that the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, would be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government would not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

The package would combine bills that would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The most controversial proposal would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge that they shouldn't be branded dangerous offenders.

# Liberals won't topple Tories: Dion

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**PUBLICATION:** The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)  
**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** C6  
**ILLUSTRATION:** Colour Photo: Reuters / Liberal Leader Stephane Dion receives a standing ovation from his caucus Wednesday in the House ;  
**DATELINE:** OTTAWA  
**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill and Norma Greenaway  
**SOURCE:** CanWest News Service  
**WORD COUNT:** 1057

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After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Dion announced the Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected next Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government. Currently, the Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois have already stated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Dion noted that the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberal government in power.

"We will propose amendments but we will not make the government fall on the throne speech, which would cause the third general election in four years — something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Dion said.

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Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election while the Liberals continue to struggle with internal turmoil over Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

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The first vote on the throne speech is due tonight on a Bloc Quebecois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Bloc also calls for aid to the hard-hit forestry sector and to eliminate the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction by providing the right to opt out with full and unconditional compensation. The throne speech offered spending power limits but did not go that far.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

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Layton suggested that Dion showed weak leadership by not voting to bring down the government to put a stop to its Conservative policies.

"I offer to the leader of the Opposition the option to do the right thing, which is to join with the NDP, which is going to be rising in opposition to the direction of this government, because it (the throne speech) can't be sugar-coated, it can't be tinkered with, with self-congratulatory commentary and amendments," Layton told the Commons.

"Will the honourable leader of the Opposition do the right thing, show some leadership and stand up to the Conservative government and its agenda, which is wrong for Canada?"

Harper came out swinging against the opposition, warning that they cannot allow the throne speech to pass and then "obstruct our core priorities."

He cited a promised sweeping anti-crime bill as the government's top priority for the new parliamentary session, and he shrugged off Dion's criticism of the speech as posturing.

"As I listened to the leader of the Opposition, he reminded me a little bit of a professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with, but then passes you anyway."

Harper accused the Liberals and other opposition parties of dragging their feet for months on a range of law-and-order bills introduced in the last session, and said he won't allow that to happen again. He said "democracy will not tolerate" further obstruction, and that Canadians are impatient for action to make their homes and streets safer.

The prime minister announced the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, would be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government would not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

The package would combine bills that would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The most controversial proposal, opposed last session by all three opposition parties, would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge that they shouldn't be branded dangerous offenders.

Harper passionately defended the bill, saying Canadians are correctly asking "how on Earth" a person who has repeatedly committed violent crimes is let out on bail.

"Our bill will make sure they will remain behind bars, where they belong."

The Liberals have not ruled out supporting the omnibus package, which could come before the Commons for debate as early as next week.

Several Liberal officials said Dion is willing to hit the campaign trail, but listened to those around him who urged him to let the government govern. They also said he is strong enough to take the criticism that will come with propping up the government.

"Everyone underestimates Mr. Dion," Ottawa MP David McGuinty told reporters. "That is the hallmark of his political career. This is not over."

# Park federal campaign buses for some time yet

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**DATE:** 2007.10.18  
**EDITION:** Final  
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**PAGE:** A11  
**COLUMN:** Susan Riley  
**BYLINE:** Susan Riley  
**SOURCE:** The Ottawa Citizen  
**WORD COUNT:** 756

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Someone clearly ran Prime Minister Stephen Harper's much-anticipated throne speech through a pebble-polisher until all the sharp edges were filed down.

No snags, no shocks, no red flags -- not much for the opposition parties to grouse about, although that won't stop them, and not enough to prompt Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion to plunge the country into an election anytime soon.

Stranger things have happened but, if Dion decides to pull the plug, it will be to spare himself and his disintegrating party a lingering death in favour of a quick leap into oblivion. While Liberal deputy leader Michael Ignatieff pronounced the speech "vague and disappointing" Tuesday night, he conceded it contained some "positive" elements (he clearly hasn't been in politics long.) Overall, he didn't sound eager to defeat the government.

What would the Liberals attack, especially from their current perilous perch, in a speech that could have easily been delivered by Paul Martin or Jean Chrétien? That is how centre-right it sounded, how cautious and imprecise.

Gone was talk of defending Canadian family values, our great friendship with the United States, the appalling corruption of previous governments; never mind thundering denunciations of big government and gold-plated public service pensions.

Critics will search in vain for evidence of the "radical right-wing agenda" that Dion says lurks behind Harper's newly moderate tone. (If it is still there, it certainly isn't obvious.)

Instead of a bold attempt to devolve federal power to the provinces, for instance, Harper promised what sounds like an idea first promoted by the Liberals: provinces can opt out of future cost-shared national social programs if they provide a similar program themselves. Gilles Duceppe deplores this idea, as expected. This is not unalloyed bad news for the prime minister.

Instead of an expensive and excessive militarization of the North, Harper plans to assert our sovereignty there with a world-class Arctic environmental research and resource development station (along with some increased military surveillance.) He is proceeding with a politically showy, but economically irresponsible promise to knock another point off the GST, but is also offering broad-based tax cuts for individuals, businesses and middle-class families. Who is going to campaign against that?

He is even joining legions of previous prime ministers of all stripes and promising to use federal power to remove barriers to interprovincial trade. He will no doubt have as much success as they have had, too — especially when Duceppe highlights this latest attack on Quebec's sovereignty.

On Afghanistan, the prime minister is particularly crafty.

Only last week, he established a five-member panel, led by former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley, that is supposed to make recommendations on what Canada should do after our formal role ends in February 2009. Then, Tuesday night, he said he wants Canadian troops to continue training Afghans to take over their own security until 2011 — a two-year extension of the existing mission. Over that period, there would presumably be a gradual withdrawal of Canadian troops.

This won't satisfy the NDP, which wants troops home now, or the Liberals, who insist on an end to our combat role in Kandahar by February 2009. But, on his side, Harper is no longer marketing an open-ended commitment to what many Canadians see as a noble, but losing cause.

Extending the mission may still be a hard sell, particularly if Canadian casualties continue. However, Harper has recast the debate by moving the goalposts. And if the Afghan mission does trigger an election, it won't likely come until after the Manley panel reports, and may only be triggered by a marked deterioration in an unpredictable war.

On the environment, the throne speech merely parroted the familiar Harper pretense — that Canada is taking tough, but fair, steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is poised to become a world leader in the global fight against climate change.

This is abject nonsense, but it is not new and may not be enough, in itself, to provoke the Liberals to vote against the throne speech. They will likely want to wait and choose their moment, convinced that Harper is firmly entrenched on the wrong side of this key issue.

As a kind of archival nod to his party's Reform roots, Harper did promise to revise legislation, promising modest reforms to the Senate and a package of anti-crime measures, some familiar, some new, all guaranteed to be ineffective when it comes to fighting violent crime. But what brave opposition party is going to go to bat for serial offenders, suspected terrorists and juvenile delinquents? Exactly.

Stand down, everyone. The election is off for the foreseeable future.

# Dignity missing

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One needn't subject oneself to a daily dose of question period to understand just how little dignity is left in Canadian politicians. One need only read the memoirs of recent prime ministers.

Although it's to be expected that parliamentarians from competing parties would take pot shots at each other when the cameras are on and when the emotions and stakes are high, the recently published memoirs of Brian Mulroney and Jean Chrétien demonstrate that, unlike with proverbial thieves, there is no honour among those who've occupied Canada's highest elected office.

Almost two decades after being embarrassed by his inability to first get past Meech Lake and then to convince Canadians to support the Charlottetown Accord, Mulroney vented his spleen on Pierre Trudeau, accusing the former Liberal PM of damaging Canada. But even that attack wasn't as low as the one Chrétien has launched against his successor and his own party.

Toronto Star columnist Rosie DiManno this week notes that Chrétien's attempt to paint himself the hero on Iraq and Martin the villainous ditherer on Afghanistan is a complete fiction.

One has to remember that before the Americans so badly screwed up the mission, Iraq was a humanitarian disaster, under the yoke of a brutal dictator and suffering from endless sanctions and a corrupt UN oil-for-food program. Canada's decision under Chretien to sit out the mission can be compared to this country's inaction over Darfur, the Rwandan genocide and the deaths of millions and rape of hundreds of thousands in the East Congo.

It wasn't a commitment to peacekeeping, active engagement or even political insight about absent weapons of mass destruction that kept Canada out of Iraq, but political cowardice.

As Canada now justifiably criticizes its NATO allies for shirking their duty by hiding in safe zones of Afghanistan — a mission committed to in 2001, when The-Small-Man-from-Shawinigan held the reins — Chretien's attempt to blame Martin for Canadian soldiers paying the price for doing their duty in the south says more about the accuser than the accused.

Dignified statesmen offer insight into history. Self-absorbed and small-minded politicians lay waste to reputations with no regard for dignity, accuracy or the impact on their country or party.

# Throne night in Canada

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**COLUMN:** Bob Robertson  
**BYLINE:** Bob Robertson  
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The Tradition continues! CBC Sports presents Throne Night in Canada, brought to you by Donuts, there's nothing that says Canada like a donut. Let's take you now to the home of the senators in Ottawa and here's Bob and Harry with the play-by-play.

Bob: Good evening, throne fans tuning in across Canada and around the world on short-wave, I'm Bob Cole along with Harry Neale, here in the broadcast gondola high above the Senate chamber in Ottawa for tonight's clash between the Conservatives and the Liberals. We're just moments away from the dropping of the writ, so Harry; let's get your thoughts on tonight's big match-up.

Harry: Well, Bob, both these teams have come to play, that's for sure. The Conservatives have to be considered the favourites tonight, although the Liberals have been here many times before and they've always got a few tricks up their sleeves.

Bob: Well, folks, let me set the scene for you here on Throne Night in Canada. The two teams are lined up behind the bar at the end of the chamber. The Conservatives are on the extreme right, wearing their familiar home uniforms, the dark suits with blue ties. The Liberals, seated slightly to the left of centre, are wearing their home uniforms, the dark suits with red ties. All the senators have taken up their usual positions, ready to jump in if necessary, although these are all members of the old-timers leagues and not as fast as they used to be. You're looking at the Conservative coach now, and folks, he's a scrapper alright. That's Stevie Harper and, oh baby, he's ready to get this thing going. Harry, what do you think Stevie's going to use as tactics tonight?

Harry: Well, Bob, Stevie Harper's become famous for using The Trap and, even though it's really dull and boring to watch, he's going to use it again tonight and probably come out on top.

Bob: OK, Harry, and Stevie's keeping a close watch on his star player tonight, Michaëlle Jean. She'll deliver all the offence for him this evening, and seated beside her is her back-up, the former break-away star, J.-D. Lafond. Meanwhile, folks, on the opposing bench we see their rookie head coach, Stéphane Dion, and although you might think so, I can tell you for sure he is definitely no relation to the great Marcel Dion who was a proven leader for his team. Whether Dion will last the season as head coach of the Liberals is hard to say, folks. Maybe tonight we'll see if he's got what it takes. Let's go downstairs now to Ron and Don for another installment of Coach's Corner. Fellas?

Ron: OK, Bob, well Grapes, once again it's the Red Chamber, no relation to Red Adair, although there'll be some big fires to put out after tonight's over.

Don: What?

Ron: I guess there's a lot of weapons that Stevie Harper can use against the Liberals tonight and I think...

Don: Hold it. Hold it. Hold it! Lemme say something to you people out there, and you kids at home write this down 'cause I can't. Harper is my kind of guy, boy. I've loved a lot of big right wingers, guys like Bobby Schmautz and boy he was somethin', but Stevie H. boy, you take a liberty with him and he'll make you pay, and like that and like that. I'll tell you what shots he's going use against these Liberal floaters. He's gonna use law and order, he's gonna use income-tax cuts, he's gonna use a five-per-cent GST and talk about a beauty move, he's gonna keep us fighting in Afghanistan, and you army guys and girls out there, I'm proud of you, God love ya!

Ron: You gotta admit though, the Liberals are hurting right now, Don. They've lost a few big guns in the last few days and there's a lot of serious team injuries.

Don: These Liberals, I'll tell ya boy, they won't go into the corners, they won't look out for each other and, right now, they're fightin' each other in the dressing room. I'd throw the book at them.

Ron: I think Chrétien just did.

Don: Yah, I've said this before, and you kids remember this, never try and hurt a guy, but when the Liberals are down like this, Big Stevie Harper's gotta go for the jugular.

Ron: Grapes, would you say the Liberals are going to fish or cut bait?

Don: There's worms comin' off the hooks right now, boy.

Ron: So Harper is offensive and Coach Dion is "throne" for a loss.

Don: Boy oh boy! That's bad.

BOB ROBERTSON's satirical take on national politics appears weekly.

# Pakistan tense for Bhutto's return; Former PM defies al-Qaeda threat

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**ILLUSTRATION:** Colour Photo: John Moore, Getty Images / A supporter of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto wears her image on a bandanna yesterday. ;  
**DATELINE:** KARACHI  
**BYLINE:** Faisal Aziz  
**SOURCE:** Reuters  
**WORD COUNT:** 407

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Pakistanis waited in suspense today for former prime minister Benazir Bhutto to return from self-imposed exile, under threat of assassination from militants linked to al-Qaeda.

For years, Ms. Bhutto had promised to return to end the military dictatorship, yet she was coming back as a potential ally of President Pervez Musharraf, the army chief who seized power in a coup in 1999.

Her homecoming in Karachi, arguably Pakistan's most violent city, was likely to be a security nightmare.

Intelligence reports suggested at least three jihadi groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban were plotting suicide attacks, according to a provincial official.

"At this moment, I'm not thinking about death," Ms. Bhutto said on Geo Television in an interview late yesterday.

"I'm going back for the people of Pakistan and it is my faith that everything will be all right."

She added that she did not believe a genuine Muslim would attack a woman.

Ms. Bhutto's flight from Dubai was expected to arrive at 1 p.m. (3 a.m. EDT), but it could take hours for her to travel through packed streets for a rally near the tomb of Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

About 20,000 security personnel were being deployed, according to the official.

No other Pakistani leader has Ms. Bhutto's mass appeal, even if aides' predictions of a million people turning out to greet her prove exaggerated.

Red, black and green flags of Ms. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party festooned streets and billboards displayed giant images of her face beneath her trademark white scarf.

Strangers could have been forgiven for believing she was still in power, rather than the increasingly unpopular Gen. Musharraf.

The general was going through his weakest period, and there was strong speculation that he would end up sharing power with Ms. Bhutto after national elections due in early January.

The United States was believed to have quietly encouraged their alliance to keep nuclear-armed Pakistan in the pro-western camp, and committed to fighting al-Qaeda and supporting NATO's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.

Ms. Bhutto has said that if she were in power, she would allow U.S. forces to strike al-Qaeda targets in Pakistani territory, if Pakistan's own forces were unable to carry out an attack.

Gen. Musharraf has already granted an amnesty to protect Ms. Bhutto from corruption charges brought by the government of Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister he overthrew and later exiled.

Pakistan's future was still very much in the balance.

The Supreme Court was hearing challenges to Gen. Musharraf's right to have stood for re-election while still army chief in a ballot he won easily on Oct. 6.

The court has been regarded as hostile to Gen. Musharraf since his abortive attempt to remove the chief justice in March, but even opposition lawyers doubted whether judges hearing the case would dare disqualify Gen. Musharraf, who had promised to quit the army if he was re-elected.

The Supreme Court was also due to hear challenges to the amnesty granted to Ms. Bhutto, raising the possibility that she might still face a jail term.

# Afghan mission in peril, European experts warn; Only more manpower can overcome NATO disunity, poor strategy

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**BYLINE:** Andrew Thomson  
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As the Conservative government announced plans this week for a military presence in Afghanistan at least two years beyond the current 2009 deadline, an influential British think-tank has warned that NATO needs more manpower to counterbalance a lack of coherent strategy and internal unity.

The Afghan mission appears locked in a "state of slow deterioration" and Afghan authorities are unprepared to assume core security functions by 2010, said a co-author of the briefing paper released by Chatham House, formally known as the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

Differing national interests among NATO members continue to threaten the mission — especially in countries such as Canada and the Netherlands, perceived to be facing the brunt of military action, said Timo Noetzel, a Chatham House visiting fellow and German political scientist who co-authored the report.

NATO's consensus-based decision structure has also allowed insurgents to selectively target coalition members with wavering public support, he said yesterday from London. "Most member states are pulling in different directions," Mr. Noetzel said. "There's a lowest common denominator (on objectives), but there's no consensus."

The report specifically cited Operation Medusa, the Canadian-led operation to retake several areas of Kandahar province in September 2006.

"Canadian commanders asked at least four allied partners for relief, but were turned down on the basis that legal restrictions would not permit their forces to come to the Canadian Forces' assistance," the report said.

"As a result of such operational experiences, national caveats have become increasingly contentious among coalition members. ... The principle of alliance solidarity has been put on the line."

These problems have been exacerbated by the thin line of soldiers on the ground, Mr. Noetzel said, especially in southern Afghanistan where Canadian troops have endured fierce fighting. Attempts to control large regions are "bound to fail" without addressing manpower and equipment shortages, the report concluded.

Thirty-seven nations have contributed troops to the 41,100-member International Security Assistance Force, including 2,500 from Canada. Seventy-one Canadian troops and one diplomat have been killed.

The Chatham House analysis was released Tuesday, the same day the speech from the throne declared that Canada's military presence should extend to 2011, beyond the current limit of February 2009. The final decision rests with the House of Commons, though the Liberals, Bloc Québécois, and NDP have opposed a combat role extension.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has also announced a five-member panel, led by former Liberal foreign affairs minister John Manley, charged with advising the government on Canada's options after the current commitment expires.

# Dion blinks, refuses to pull plug on Tories; Canadians 'want Parliament to do its job,' embattled leader says

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**ILLUSTRATION:** Photo: Chris Wattie, Reuters / Canadians don't want another election, Liberal leader Stéphane Dion said yesterday while giving his party's grudging support for the Conservatives' throne speech. With his party in disarray, and his own leadership in question, it's clear Mr. Dion didn't want an election either. ;

**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill and Norma Greenaway

**SOURCE:** The Ottawa Citizen

**WORD COUNT:** 938

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Liberal leader Stéphane Dion threw cold water on election fever in the Commons yesterday, saying the official Opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

After many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Mr. Dion announced the Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected next Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government. Currently, the Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois have already stated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Mr. Dion noted that the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement and the Conservatives abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberal government in power.

"We will propose amendments, but we will not make the government fall on the throne speech, which would cause the third general election in four years -- something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Mr. Dion said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the throne speech, they will have to also pass the laws that flow from it. NDP leader Jack Layton suggested Mr. Dion is a weak leader who doesn't have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Mr. Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election.

The Liberals have been in internal turmoil over Mr. Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials, and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

In their response to the speech, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to

come to a vote Monday.

The first vote on the throne speech is due tonight on a Bloc Québécois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Bloc also calls for aid to the hard-hit forestry sector and elimination of the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction by providing the right to opt out with full and unconditional compensation.

The throne speech offered spending power limits, but did not go that far.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what non-combat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

The NDP has repeatedly called for the immediate withdrawal of troops and the government said in the throne speech that while Parliament will vote on the future of the mission, it prefers a training program that would last until 2011.

In their amendment, the Liberals blame the government for failing to meet the first stage of targets under the Kyoto accord on climate change and call for a catch-up plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the second phase.

The amendment also calls for an anti-poverty plan, which Mr. Dion said "will be at the heart of our Liberal agenda." And it calls for corporate tax reductions — which the government did promise in the throne speech — and other measures to improve the economy.

Mr. Layton suggested that Mr. Dion showed weak leadership by not voting to bring down the government.

"I offer to the leader of the opposition the option to do the right thing, which is to join with the NDP, which is going to be rising in opposition to the direction of this government, because it (the throne speech) can't be sugar-coated, it can't be tinkered with, with self-congratulatory commentary and amendments," Mr. Layton told the Commons.

"Will the honourable leader of the opposition do the right thing, show some leadership and stand up to the Conservative government and its agenda, which is wrong for Canada?"

Mr. Harper came out swinging against the opposition, warning that they cannot allow the throne speech to pass and then "obstruct our core priorities."

He cited a promised sweeping anti-crime bill as the government's top priority for the new parliamentary session, and he shrugged off Mr. Dion's criticism of the speech as posturing.

Mr. Harper accused the Liberals and other opposition parties of dragging their feet for months on a range of law-and-order bills introduced in the last session, and said he won't allow that to happen again. He said "democracy will not tolerate" further obstruction, and that Canadians are impatient for action to make their homes and streets safer.

The prime minister announced that the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, would be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government would not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

Dion blinks, refuses to pull plug on Tories; Canadians 'want Parliament to do its job,' embattled leader says

The package would combine bills that would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The most controversial proposal, opposed last session by all three opposition parties, would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge that they shouldn't be branded dangerous offenders.

Mr. Harper passionately defended the bill, saying Canadians are correctly asking "how on Earth" a person who has repeatedly committed violent crimes is let out on bail.

"Our bill will make sure they will remain behind bars, where they belong."

The Liberals have not ruled out supporting the omnibus package, which could come before the Commons for debate as early as next week.

Ottawa Citizen with files from Mike De Souza, CanWest News Service

# Why we're creating the Canadian International Council; The CIC will be a Canadian player among global foreign relations councils

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The days are long gone when Canadians could believe they lived in a fireproof house, insulated from world events. A glance at the front pages of this newspaper most days is enough to confirm that we are global citizens living amid dangerous, deep-seated problems — including those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur and the Congo, to name only the bloodiest; to al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the Janjaweed, the most murderous; to HIV-AIDS, malaria, avian flu, climate change and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the most insidious. Last summer, thousands of Canadians in Lebanon and Israel suddenly found themselves in a war zone, caught up in an unexpected conflict as cluster bombs and rockets rained down, needing rescue in what was to become the largest evacuation in Canadian history. Canadians are neither immune nor, in most cases, remote from the harm such conflicts can cause. Rarely has it been so important for us to understand the world, and to engage it.

The good news is that the world has never been richer, technology has never been so powerful, medicine has never been so advanced, people have never been better educated and Canada has never been wealthier. We are the best-informed generation in history. Yet knowledge is slow to translate into policy and action, especially when it comes to the changing global order.

My conviction that Canada is uniquely positioned to bridge the disconnect between human achievement and global challenges motivated me to endow both the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), a five-year-old think-tank based in Waterloo, Ont., working on global issues, and the new Balsillie School of International Affairs. These institutions are attracting some of the best minds to Canada from around the globe to collaborate, propose solutions and educate the next generation of international policy makers.

Now, to complement these two international initiatives, and to create a research base on Canadian foreign policy, I have spearheaded the creation of the Canada-wide Canadian International Council (CIC). The Americans have their powerful Council on Foreign Relations, which offers non-partisan analysis of international issues and integrates business leaders with the best researchers and public policy leaders. The British have long depended on the Royal Institute of International Affairs for the research that has assisted that nation to punch far above its weight. Similar institutions exist in Europe, Latin America, Asia and in many developing countries. George Soros has been instrumental in the creation of the European Council on Foreign Relations, which will be launched in November. The CIC will be the Canadian player in this global network of foreign relations councils.

It is vitally important that we Canadians understand the world if we are to protect ourselves, and others, from its dangers, and profit from its opportunities. The objective of the CIC is to generate the best Canadian research, develop the finest Canadian analysts and train Canada's most promising future leaders. A partnership between CIGI and the Canadian Institute for International Affairs (CIIA), the Canadian International Council will be housed at the University of Toronto. Taking advantage of the nationwide branch network of the CIIA to help mobilize and boost Canadian capacity on pressing global problems, the CIC will be a research-based, non-partisan vehicle. Applying expert and fact-based research to complex issues is the essential foundation for creating effective policy.

Business leaders have an opportunity to play a transformative role for Canada by supporting CIC research fellowships. The CIC will create co-ordinated research clusters of excellence among universities and think-tanks across Canada on the most pressing global issues that matter to Canadians. And it will ensure that future leadership debates and elections in this country never again ignore the world and the opportunities and dangers it presents to us.

So far, my first dozen or so overtures to corporate leaders have been uniformly favourable; the CIC is well on its way to establishing an important program. To further

raise awareness and generate support, AGF president Blake Goldring and I will be hosting a gala inaugural dinner for the CIC on Oct. 25 in Toronto. We hope that this will become an important annual Canadian event, attended by national and international policy, academic, media and business leaders. Next week, we will confer our first Globalist of the Year Award to Angel Gurria, the Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, who has held many high-profile positions in Mexico, including finance minister and president and CEO of Mexico's national development bank.

Our commitment is to build a strong council that will advance Canadian interests, promote Canadian values and provide a badly needed Canadian perspective on the border-less issues of our time. Building this capacity is not just good business. It is also good citizenship.

—Jim Balsillie, pictured at left, is co-chief executive officer of Research In Motion Ltd.

# How dion can get his groove back

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**COLUMN:** Warren Kinsella

**BYLINE:** Warren Kinsella

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Sad. That is the only way to describe the plight of Liberal leader Stephane Dion. But it's not all his own doing. For Mr. Dion's Liberal party, the Gomery Commission was a shattering blow —discrediting federalism and the perception that Liberals could manage government, all at once. The party has yet to recover from it.

The selection of Mr. Dion as Liberal leader last December in Montreal was the right decision. Principled, honest, decent and fearless, Mr. Dion was one of the few Quebec Liberal politicians to emerge from the sponsorship affair personally unscathed. He was respected in English Canada for his battles with the separatists, and his environmental credentials positioned him as the right candidate at the right time.

But the intervening months, as we all know, have not been kind to Mr. Dion or his party. Listless, divided, drifting, the Liberal party seems to be headed sooner or later for a punishing defeat at the hands of the better-funded, better-organized Conservative machine of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

But it need not be that way. Here are a few modest suggestions for the beleaguered federal Grit leader that, if implemented, would go some way to lifting his and Liberal fortunes:

—Policy: On the key issues of the day —Kyoto, Afghanistan and federalism— Mr. Dion and his party are well positioned. In all three cases, he needs to clearly distinguish himself from the other political parties.

He can do that by saying, to all who will listen: "We are the party that will ratify Kyoto, not kill it. We are the party that will bring back our young men and women from Afghanistan within a year of our election, and not at some distant date in

the future. And we are the party that opposes dismantling federalism by stealth, as Stephen Harper promised to do in his Throne Speech. Under a Liberal government, Ottawa will not become the headwaiter to the provinces."

—People: As with the two other opposition leaders —including the aforementioned Mr. Harper — the Canadian people do not yet know Stephane Dion. That is how it is when you are in opposition. Mr. Dion needs to launch a populist charm offensive, travelling regularly to regional media markets, holding policy conferences so that the media and voters can get to know him. He shouldn't change who he is (a "strategy" that never works, anyway).

—Press: As the Post's freelance media observer, I can assure Mr. Dion of one thing: The national media are not fans of the current Conservative regime. As one former prime minister once said to me: "In this job, you don't end up liking the media very much. The key is to never show it." For reasons best known to himself, Mr.

Harper shows it. Mr. Dion, therefore, needs to coddle and cajole the press corps whenever and however possible. It may sound hokey, but it'll work. Like everyone else, journalists do not want to be treated like criminals for doing their job.

–Party: Since December, the Grits have been in desperate need of new blood. Too many Martin–era advisors cling to Mr. Dion's robes, mainly because none of them could find meaningful work anywhere else. Too many Members of Parliament seem to be watching the clock, loitering in the House of Commons to bolster their MP pensions. Dion needs to clean out the stables, bringing in better, experienced staff, as well as a younger gang of candidates, as diverse as the country they would hope to serve. In Ontario, Mr. Dion need look no further than the Dalton McGuinty team, whose battle–ready veterans know how to take him to the next level. (Full disclosure: During the election campaign, I fought on a voluntary basis with Team McGuinty myself. But I might add that I have no personal interest in returning to federal politics.)

–Finally, the Dion Liberals need to quit their whining. Sure, opposition is no fun. Sure, it's frustrating. But the last election, as I recall, was mainly about sending the Liberal Party of Canada to the penalty box for a while, so that it can learn a few lessons. Until it learns those lessons, the Liberal party will remain what it is. Which is to say, mired on the opposition benches and sad.

–Warren Kinsella's new book, *The War Room*, is published this month by Dundurn.

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA

# Harper's master stroke

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Tuesday 's Throne Speech was a master stroke, both as a policy blueprint and political stratagem. It enumerates a clear set of sensible priorities in five vital areas. At the same time, the speech also lures the opposition Liberals into tangles that benefit the Conservatives politically. No matter which way the speech eventually spins out — into a full session of lawmaking on Parliament Hill or into a nationwide campaign — it is a win-win for the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

The speech's five broad themes were the economy, Canadian sovereignty, federal-provincial relations, the environment and law-and-order. On each one, the government has the Liberals over the same barrel. Opposition Leader Stephane Dion must now either convince his caucus to back policies most of them detest or force an election his party is unprepared to fight.

With their party in disarray, especially in Quebec, the Liberals would be foolish to force a national campaign now. And they seem to sense that. Reports out of Wednesday's Grit caucus meeting said just six of about 30 speakers advocated a vote of non-confidence on the Throne Speech. Mr. Dion's comments to media suggest he, too, is gun-shy.

But in order to keep the Tories in office, the Liberals will either have to vote for environmental and military options they have repeatedly denounced in the past, or else abstain. Either option would mark an embarrassing climb-down from positions Mr. Dion has clung to passionately even before he became his party's leader.

In the Throne Speech, the Conservatives committed to lowering the GST by another percentage point as well as bringing in broad-based personal and corporate tax cuts by February's federal budget, if not sooner. Last spring, Mr. Dion said a further reduction to the GST would be a disaster. Still he seemed to parrot much of the government's line on personal and corporate cuts during a preemptive address to the Economic Club of Toronto last Thursday. Sounding remarkably like a supply-side economist, Mr. Dion insisted, rightly, that among other things "a lower corporate tax rate is a powerful weapon in the federal government's [economic] arsenal."

No party is likely to oppose the Tories' plans to expand Arctic naval patrols or build an Arctic research superstation to enhance our northern sovereignty. But on crime, Afghanistan and the environment, Mr. Dion and his charges will have a tougher time finding common ground with Mr. Harper.

The government will seek a two-year extension to Canada's mission in Afghanistan, from 2009 to 2011. Mr. Dion has pandered so aggressively to the left wing of his party (and to potential NDP and Green voters), it is hard to see a credible way out for him on this file. He has demanded on several occasion that we stay to the end of our mandate in February, 2009, but not a minute longer.

The same goes for the environment. The Throne Speech ends the charade of Canada trying to meet its unrealistic Kyoto emission targets. Instead, it commits the government to working toward economically

sensible alternatives to reduce our so-called carbon footprint, alongside other large-scale industrial emitters. But Mr. Dion has been Kyoto's most dedicated champion among Western leaders. He has accused the Tories of presiding over the destruction of the climate by not honouring Kyoto. How can he now keep a straight face and back a Throne Speech that tramples every bit of his earlier rhetoric?

But Mr. Dion's greatest troubles may be on law-and-order. Here, the Throne Speech promised to reintroduce five bills that died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued — bills that would make it easier to keep violent criminals in jail, make it harder for gun-crime suspects to win bail, and establish mandatory prison terms for gun crimes. It was his Senate caucus — over which Mr. Dion has little control — that obstructed the Tories' crime agenda. Even if his Commons caucus passes it again, Mr. Dion may still find himself explaining to voters why his party is compromising their safety.

In short, the Tories hit one well over the fence with this speech, and have left their opponents scrambling to retrieve the ball.

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA

# Australians trust Howard, survey shows

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**COLUMN:** World Report  
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**DATELINE:** SYDNEY  
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SYDNEY –The hopes of Australian Prime Minister John Howard, pictured, for a fifth term received a boost yesterday when an opinion poll showed most voters trust him on the key election battleground of managing the economy. The Newspan published in The Australian newspaper came as Mr. Howard and his Labour party rival, Kevin Rudd, suspended campaigning to attend the funeral of a soldier killed in Afghanistan. The poll showed while Mr. Howard's conservative coalition continued to trail Labour 56% to 44%, more voters felt he was best equipped to handle economic management and national security. The survey of 1,177 voters gave the Prime Minister a glimmer of hope in an election expected to be decided on issues such as taxes, affordable housing and interest rates.

**KEYWORDS:** ASYLUM; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS

# Dion backs away from election; Confidence Vote

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**BYLINE:** Juliet O'Neill And Norma Greenaway  
**SOURCE:** CanWest News Service, with files from Mike DeSouza  
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OTTAWA – Stephane Dion yesterday made a snap election seem unlikely by saying the official Opposition will not try to defeat the minority Conservative government over the Throne Speech.

After deliberations in which many Liberals advised him against hitting the campaign trail too soon, Mr. Dion announced his Liberals would abstain from a non-confidence vote that could topple the government because Canadians "want Parliament to do its job."

The confidence vote is expected on Wednesday. It would take all three opposition parties voting in unison to defeat the government. Currently, the Liberals hold the deciding vote because the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois have already stated their intention to vote against the Throne Speech.

Forestalling allegations that he is abdicating his party's role as official Opposition, Mr. Dion noted that the NDP abstained last year from a confidence vote on the softwood lumber agreement, and the Tories abstained from the 2005 budget vote to keep the then-minority Liberal government in power.

"We will propose amendments but we will not make the government fall on the Throne Speech, which would cause the third general election in four years -- something Canadians have clearly shown they do not want," Mr. Dion said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded by saying if the opposition is going to pass the Throne Speech, it will have to also pass the laws that flow from it. NDP leader Jack Layton suggested Mr. Dion is a weak leader who does not have the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Mr. Dion's speech came after a lively parliamentary caucus meeting. Insiders said that of about 40 MPs and senators who spoke up, only a handful were keen on a fall election while the Liberals continue to struggle with internal turmoil over Mr. Dion's leadership, a string of resignations by party officials, and continued fallout from recent byelection losses in Quebec.

In their response to the Speech from the Throne, the Liberals proposed an amendment to several key elements, touching on the environment, the military mission in Afghanistan, poverty and the economy. The amendment is expected to come to a vote on Monday.

The first vote on the Throne Speech is due tonight on a Bloc Quebecois sub-amendment that condemns the current Tory and former Liberal governments for inaction on climate change.

The Bloc also calls for aid to the hard-hit forestry sector and to eliminate the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction by providing the right to opt out with full and unconditional compensation. The Throne Speech offered spending power limits but did not go that far.

The Liberal amendment is designed for rejection by the government and the NDP as it calls for an announcement that the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar will end as scheduled in February, 2009, and discussions with NATO and Afghanistan on "what noncombat role Canada can play afterwards to aid in the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

The NDP has repeatedly called for the immediate withdrawal of troops and the government said in the Throne Speech that while Parliament will vote on the future of the mission, it prefers a training program that would last until 2011.

The Prime Minister yesterday announced that the new omnibus anti-crime legislation, dubbed the Tackling Violent Crime bill, would be treated as a matter of confidence by the government, and that the government would not accept amendments to the substance of the package.

The package would combine bills that would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The most controversial proposal, opposed last session by all three opposition parties, would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge that they should not be branded dangerous offenders.

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA

# Majority rule in all but name; Conservatives can enact agenda with Liberals' help

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**COLUMN:** Don Martin  
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**BYLINE:** Don Martin  
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OTTAWA –Liberal leader Stephane Dion looked out over his brooding caucus yesterday morning and saw dead people –dozens of MPs bracing for their forced march into an electoral Jonestown where tombstones would be the final result.

That's when he knew there could be no retreat with honour, only the indignity of Mr. Dion's unconditional surrender to a "hyper-Conservative platform" that may yet form the basis for his bitter rival's next campaign.

The Speech from the Throne will pass intact next week with the once-proud Liberals sitting in the stony silence of absentia, but safe from an Armageddon-esque judgment day at the polls.

A theme for this Parliament has now been set. Canada's Official Opposition is but a government whack-a-mole game with Prime Minister Stephen Harper using the election hammer to knock them down every time they raise their heads.

It makes you wonder why sources are telling me the Conservatives are firing up yet another series of television ads to celebrate themselves and ridicule their flailing opponent. It's clearly overkill of a twitching corpse.

The proof of Mr. Dion's dire straits echoed across the hall, where those with a keen ear yesterday morning would have heard ecstatic Conservatives giving Prime Minister Stephen Harper five cheering ovations inside of five minutes, including one slightly sarcastic version for media briefly allowed into the room.

When Mr. Dion rose in the House of Commons three hours later, he got a standing ovation, too, but one suspects it was a show of relief from MPs who had just heard their leader delay their demise.

The contrast between Mr. Dion and Mr. Harper in style and substance during the Throne Speech aftermath could not have been more tellingly distinct. Mr. Dion, his eyes glued to his text, spoke in a flat voice devoid of passion or genuine commitment — which befits someone dining on a smorgasbord of political crow.

Mr. Harper grinned gleefully during his opponent's recitation, making notes he could use to poke fun at Mr. Dion, comparing him to a professor who grades the Conservatives poorly on one area after another, then issues a passing mark.

In matters of substance, Mr. Dion argued that delaying an election Canada doesn't want and making Parliament work trumped his party's obligation to defend the downtrodden, push to end the Afghanistan combat mission on schedule in 2009, and maintain Canada's Kyoto commitment to greenhouse gas reduction.

Mr. Harper, emboldened by the white flags he saw flapping across the aisle, shrugged it all off, declared his omnibus crime bill bulletproof from any amendment and warned that a repeat of the Senate's obstructionism could have drastic consequences.

"If the Senate cannot reform, I think most Canadians will also eventually conclude that it should be abolished," he warned. That's constitutionally improbable, but ... ouch.

The Conservative benches greeted all this with predictable howls and heckles at Mr. Dion as he squirmed to justify support for a speech that will ultimately turn the government's blueprint into a Liberal-embraced red book.

The Conservatives know they are not only safely reelected should an accidental vote be triggered, but remain in firm control of their destiny despite sitting as a relatively weak minority government.

One Liberal's reaction was particularly telling. When all other MPs rose to celebrate a rare good jab in Mr. Dion's address, deputy leader Michael Ignatieff seemed to stay in his seat most of the time. I'm not sure whether this was a sudden attack of leg cramps or the opening shot of a leadership challenge, but the optic was hard to miss.

Perhaps the strangest argument submitted by Mr. Dion for his actions was to argue that an Official Opposition was vital to defend Canada from the allegedly scary unilateralism of a Conservative majority which, he warned, would produce a hard-right manifesto had the Liberals not stood on guard for thee. Pray tell how governing with a fetal-position Opposition is any different from majority rule?

Now, now, Liberal insiders insist, a fall election is still a real possibility. They predict the Conservatives will find a way to insert some devilish detail into a piece of legislation that will force them over the abyss, a plunge they are willing to take even if it is to many Liberal deaths. Perhaps that's possible. After all, they can't surrender forever.

But if a Kyoto-killing, Afghanistan mission-extending, federalism-limiting agenda that met none of the litmus tests for acceptance issued by Mr. Dion just a month ago is allowed to pass by the Liberals, it's hard to imagine any mere detail sending Canada to the polls.

Unless the Liberals recover their footing, Parliament appears to have elected a majority Conservative government in legislative power if not in democratic seats.

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## JUSTICE BILLS REVISITED

C-10

### MINIMUM SENTENCES FOR FIREARMS CRIMES

Increases mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment for individuals who commit serious or repeat firearm offences, and creates two new offences: breaking and entering to steal a firearm, or robbery to steal a firearm.

Liberal position

Majority rule in all but name; Conservatives can enact agenda with Liberals' help

Sought to remove many of mandatory minimum penalties during committee discussion; several were later restored

Status

Held up by Senate

C-22

#### AGE OF SEXUAL PROTECTION BILL

Raises the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. Includes exceptions for sexual activity between a 14-or 15-year-old youth and someone who is less than five years older, as the aim is to protect youths against exploitation by adult predators.

Liberal position

Support bill

Status

Passed by the House in May. Held up by the Senate

C-32

#### IMPAIRED DRIVING BILL

Would strengthen ability of police to enforce laws against driving while impaired by drugs. Proving drug impairment is currently more difficult than detecting alcohol impairment. Also increases penalties for both drug and alcohol offences, and restricts challenges to breathalyzer results.

Liberal position

Support bill in principle

Status

Still in committee when Parliament dissolved

C-21

#### FIREARMS AND GUN REGISTRY BILL

Would end the need to obtain a gun registry certificate for non-restricted firearms such as hunting rifles or shotguns. Gun owners would still have to hold a licence and undergo a background check. Existing restrictions would still apply to restricted weapons.

Liberal position

Liberals created the firearms registry and oppose weakening its scope

Status

Majority rule in all but name; Conservatives can enact agenda with Liberals' help

Passed first reading but died when Parliament dissolved

C-27

#### REPEAT OFFENDERS BILL

An offender convicted of a third violent or sexual crime carrying a sentence of two years or more would automatically be classified a "dangerous offender", and could be jailed as long as they are viewed as a risk to society. The bill would shift responsibility to the offender to convince a judge they did not present a danger.

Liberal position

Opposed

Status

Held up in committee deliberations

C-35

#### REVERSE ONUS HEARINGS BILL

Aimed at restricting the release of accused charged with offences involving firearms. Reverses the onus in bail hearings so that the accused would be required to demonstrate why bail should be granted.

Liberal position

Support bill

Status

Held up by the Senate

**KEYWORDS:** POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA

# FEDERAL COURT OF CANADA Throw out case on detainee policy, Ottawa urges But human-rights groups argue that Canada is still exposing Afghan prisoners to a substantial risk of torture

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**SECTION:** National News

**SOURCE:** CP

**EDITION:** Metro

**DATELINE:** Ottawa ONT

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**JIM BRONSKILL** The Canadian Press OTTAWA A federal lawyer characterized a legal challenge to the government's prisoner transfer policy in Afghanistan as "a political submission" that should be thrown out of court.

Government counsel J. Sanderson Graham told the Federal Court of Canada yesterday there is no evidence to support the case mounted by human-rights groups.

If successful, the motion to strike the application for review would derail the case before the parties get to the heart of the matter.

Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association contend that a December, 2005, transfer arrangement between Canada and Afghanistan lacks adequate safeguards to prevent torture of prisoners.

Allegations have persisted since April that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were mistreated after being handed over to the Afghan government.

The government confirmed in May there had been accusations of abuse in six individual cases, and that Canada was looking into the complaints.

Ottawa has renegotiated the 2005 agreement with Kabul to allow Canadian officials to check up on the detainees after their transfer.

Mr. Graham said the rights groups have not produced specific evidence showing anyone has actually been abused. They cannot rely upon assumptions for which there is no proof, he said.

In a response filed with the court, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association say such specifics are unnecessary.

They note that in deportation and extradition cases the Federal Court has simply demanded evidence that there is a serious risk of torture in the destination country.

"The standard of proof in such matters cannot and must not be too onerous." The human-rights groups say reports of widespread abuse in Afghanistan mean that handing detainees over to local authorities exposes them to substantial risk of torture, a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The government argues that the Charter does not apply in this case because Canada is not an occupying power and does not exercise military or civilian control in any part of Afghanistan.

In its response, Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association call the federal position "an erroneous and even frightening view of the law.

Mr. Graham said a detainee who wished to complain about alleged abuses could do so by taking legal action in Canada.

Madam Justice Anne Mactavish asked whether it is realistic to think an Afghan detainee would be able to pursue such an avenue.

"You're presuming they know about the Charter." Paul Champ, a lawyer for the human-rights groups, said the notion that Afghan prisoners could institute proceedings in a Canadian court was "simply unbelievable."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: justice; human rights; prisoners; strife

ORGANIZATION NAME: Amnesty International Canada; British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

# PARLIAMENT Dion rightly lets the show go on

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**SECTION:** Editorial

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper said it best: Liberal Leader Stephane Dion sounded yesterday like "a professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with, but then passes you anyway." As Mr. Dion rhymed off his grievances with the Conservatives' Speech from the Throne, he might have been expected to announce that his party would vote against it. Instead, he concluded by signalling that the Liberals will decline the opportunity to bring down the government, likely by abstaining from the vote. (In the improbable event that proposed amendments put forward by Mr. Dion are supported by the other opposition parties and added to the Throne Speech, the Liberals will vote in favour of it.) Mr. Dion's critics will paint this as an act of cowardice. But to force an election would not have been brave; it would have been foolhardy. As the latest turmoil within its Quebec wing shows, Mr.

Dion's party is nowhere near ready for a national campaign. Its organization is in a shambles, too many of its policies are ill-defined and the leader himself is a long way from being ready for prime time. What is remarkable is not that he will allow the government to stand for the time being, but that he reportedly had to be talked out of bringing it down by members of his caucus.

Avoiding a fall election is not just the right decision for the Official Opposition; it is also best for the country. There is little indication that Canadians are hungry for another vote. And the Conservatives, despite the Liberals' weak position, have resisted the urge to bait them into forcing a campaign, and instead have put forward a workable and relatively conciliatory agenda for the new parliamentary session.

With tax relief, a plan to combat climate change and a promised vote on the future of the Afghanistan mission, it is mostly in step with Canadians' needs and desires.

Since the Tories have been given an opportunity to move forward with that agenda, it is now up to them to do so in good faith. Mr.

Harper has previously suggested that every legislative vote in this session will be a confidence vote – a strategy he appeared to favour again yesterday when he said that the first bill brought forward this session, the sweeping Tackling Violent Crime Act, will be a matter of confidence. But if he is serious about getting down to the business of government, he will instead let bills be judged case by case and will remain open to opposition amendments.

Making a minority government work requires a degree of compromise.

Whatever their motives, the two biggest parties have shown hints of that spirit this week. There is no reason to revert to pointless gamesmanship now.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: government; political; throne speech

PERSONAL NAME: Stephane Dion

ORGANIZATION NAME: Conservative Party of Canada; Liberal Party

# AFGHAN PANEL Manley's per diem up to \$1,400

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ALAN FREEMAN OTTAWA Nice work if you can get it.

Former deputy prime minister John Manley, who was appointed last week to head a five-member panel of eminent persons investigating the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, will be paid between \$1,200 and \$1,400 a day by the federal government for his trouble.

According to orders-in-council published by the Privy Council Office, the four other panel members will be getting a per-diem of \$850 to \$1,000.

All five have been appointed to the position of "special advisers to the prime minister" as members of what is known officially as the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan.

The panel is to submit its report and recommendations by Jan.

31 although their terms end on March 31.

There was no indication of how many days a week the panel is expected to meet but if the schedule calls for 15 days of work a month, that would still result in fees for the regular members of \$15,000 per month and more for Mr. Manley.

Mr. Manley has been a lawyer for McCarthy Tetrault since retiring from politics. Former diplomat Derek Burney is currently an adviser to law firm Ogilvy Renault, while former energy minister Jake Epp is chairman of Ontario Power Generation. Onetime broadcaster Pamela Wallin, who also served as Canada's consul-general in New York, is currently chancellor of Guelph University.

The fifth member is Paul Tellier, former head of Canadian National Railway and onetime clerk of the privy council.

**ADDED SEARCH TERMS:**

**GEOGRAPHIC NAME:** Canada; Afghanistan

**SUBJECT TERM:**foreign policy; government contracts; finance

**PERSONAL NAME:** John Manley

# FEDERAL POLITICS: 'THEY HAVE TO AGREE TO IT, OR WE'LL HAVE AN ELECTION' Harper reloads with crime ultimatum Government won't accept amendments to bill, PM says after Liberals attempt to dodge bullet by abstaining on Throne Speech

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**BYLINE:** CAMPBELL CLARK

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**EDITION:** Metro

**DATELINE:** Ottawa ONT

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CAMPBELL CLARK With reports from Gloria Galloway and Brian Laghi OTTAWA Prime Minister Stephen Harper brushed past the Liberals' decision yesterday to abstain from voting on the Throne Speech, staking the government's survival on a new uncompromising stand on crime legislation.

While Liberal Leader Stephane Dion's move means the government will survive early confidence votes on its broad agenda – avoiding an immediate election campaign – Mr. Harper quickly said he would set a potential new obstacle in Mr. Dion's path.

The Prime Minister insisted his government will not accept any amendments to an omnibus crime bill that will revive a series of bills killed when he prorogued Parliament.

And Conservative sources said the new omnibus legislation will strip out some amendments that had been passed in the last session – forcing the opposition to accept at least some measures they deemed unacceptable last term.

"They have to agree to it, or we'll have an election," said Jay Hill, the Conservative government's chief whip.

Whether the new omnibus bill will truly set the government on a collision course with the opposition depends on the details – and the Prime Minister's spokesmen pointedly refused to reveal any.

That bill will be tabled today, but it is still unclear how long it will take before it reaches the stage where it would be put to a confidence vote.

A Conservative source said that one portion, on tougher sentences for gun crimes, will reflect NDP amendments the Tories had accepted in the last session, but other portions of the new bill will undo opposition amendments – daring them to back down.

Mr. Harper adopted a new, harder tone on both crime legislation and Afghanistan immediately after Mr. Dion declared Liberal MPs would abstain from voting on the Throne Speech.

Mr. Dion said his party will not vote because Canadians do not want an election, although he blasted many elements of the Throne Speech, especially the government's position on climate-change measures, and offered his own amendments.

"If they are rejected, we will do as the NDP, when it decided on Oct. 16, 2006, to abstain on the vote on the softwood lumber agreement in order to avoid causing an election," Mr. Dion said in a Commons speech.

He quoted Mr. Harper's own reasons, when he was leader of the opposition, for abstaining on a 2005 budget vote to avoid an early election, and when he was pressed in debate later by the NDP, Mr.

Dion pointed to the Prime Minister and added, "It worked for him and it will work for me." Mr. Harper then said the government will not only make its new crime bill a confidence matter that could trigger an election, but also that changes would not be allowed.

"We will be seeking timely passage of this legislation, and as is the case with confidence measures, the government will not accept amendments to the substance of these initiatives." Opposition politicians said they will wait to see the details of the crime bill today, but charged that the Conservatives are trying to create another showdown.

After the government indicated in its Throne Speech that it would table the crime bill, both the Liberals and NDP said they did not expect a confrontation. Amended versions of most of the previous bills had been passed in various stages in the Commons, but had not yet passed through the Senate, making them law.

However, if important changes are stripped out, there will be a confrontation, they said.

"The showdown here is not a sincere effort to get legislation passed," Liberal House Leader Ralph Goodale said last night. "It's obviously intended to continue the atmosphere of crisis." The New Democrats, who had struck deals with the Tories to amend several of the predecessor crime bills, were livid.

"Obviously they have decided they want an election, they've decided they want to run that election on the crime file. They are quite prepared to sacrifice the interests of victims of crime that some of this legislation in fact would help," NDP justice critic Joe Comartin said.

"This is pure partisan politics at its worst." Mr. Harper also hardened his tone on Afghanistan.

He indicated that his Throne Speech assertion that Canadians should remain in Afghanistan after the current mission ends in 2009 to train Afghan forces means that he wants Canadian troops to stay in the dangerous Kandahar region until 2011.

"We will continue our preferences to continue that track and we believe it should be completed by 2011," Mr. Harper said.

Liberal defence critic Denis Coderre later insisted that position is still vague, because it is unclear whether the government wants to keep a large contingent of troops in combat activities after 2009.

Even before the showdown on the crime bill, there are still several votes before the Conservative Throne Speech is approved by the Commons.

Mr. Dion tabled an amendment attacking the speech on climate change, Afghanistan, the economy and poverty, but it will not pass because the Tories and the NDP, at least, will reject it.

"An amendment that calls for us to stay longer in Afghanistan, doesn't even mention Bill C-30 [the Clean Air

Act] that was supposed to be so important, calls for a big corporate tax cut and otherwise spends time congratulating their failed record isn't a serious amendment or proposal," Mr. Layton said. "They are clearly playing some kind of parliamentary game and it's frankly just sad." The Bloc Quebecois also presented a subamendment that will not pass. It calls on the government to dramatically limit its spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction and names the Liberals as culprits in the failure of Canada to meet Kyoto greenhouse-gas reduction targets.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: government; political; legislation; crime; statements

PERSONAL NAME: Stephen Harper; Stephane Dion

ORGANIZATION NAME: Conservative Party of Canada; Liberal Party

# PM's trick is to shift national gaze to Dion

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**DATELINE:** Ottawa  
**BYLINE:** James Travers  
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Clever as ever, the prime minister is rephrasing the big political question: Once about Stephen Harper and trust, it's now about St phane Dion and competence.

A beleaguered Liberal leader only made it easier to answer yesterday by choosing temporary self-preservation instead of a risky election fought on principles. His tortured reluctance to topple the Conservative minority over a throne speech crafted to offend his sensibilities buys time. But it does little to inspire confidence in Dion's fitness to lead or repair the fissures in a party that once prided itself on being the western world's most successful.

Much as he did in bungling Quebec byelections, Dion allowed Liberals to be boxed in by the throne speech. As the prime minister made clear yesterday, Conservatives will spend the coming weeks nailing down the lid, beginning with a confidence vote on omnibus crime legislation.

Liberals helped make their current mess possible. In overlooking more accomplished candidates in choosing a leader with suspect strategic skills and weak caucus support, convention delegates set in motion the events now unfolding here.

All of this makes capital theatre even if elsewhere the brinksmanship is watched, if at all, with disbelief. But what's largely missed in witnessing Harper play politics so adroitly — doubters need only consider the artful pre-throne speech orchestration of an unusual press conference, an equalization deal with Nova Scotia and the appointment of John Manley's Afghanistan panel — is how much this prime minister is changing the Canadian brand.

In 4,000 words and 40 minutes Tuesday night, Harper described a country many of its citizens would struggle to recognize. That Canada breaks its international treaty commitment to fight climate change, fuels unfounded fears to advance a law-and-order agenda and effectively commits to extending a polarizing Afghanistan mission months before Parliament will consider the options.

Subtler if equally worthy of citizen attention is what the prime minister has in mind for the federation. With a policy mix reflecting his concerns for provincial rights and market efficiency, Harper is simultaneously proposing to loosen and tighten central control.

Generally appealing to Conservatives and an affront to Liberals, Harper's recreation of Canada more in the image of its North American neighbour than its traditional European soulmates demands thorough and thoughtful deconstruction. Normally that work would mostly fall to the official Opposition, either on Parliament Hill or in an election. But these times are far from normal.

A suspect leader and a party so unprepared for a campaign that it genuflects to calculated humiliations is poorly positioned to expose the fault lines in government policies or proselytize credible alternatives. Dion's escape, one he tested yesterday, is to first bring the question back to Harper's designs on Canada and then offer the country a choice.

That won't be easy. His vision isn't clear, Liberals are infected with the opposition dissention virus and are now the common target for their collective rivals. Rarely does it get worse in the blood sport played here with such relish. Conservatives are vulnerable on the environment, Afghanistan and for an authoritarian core character that unsettles voters whenever it surfaces. But those are mere asterisks as long as the country is questioning about the Liberal leader, not the Conservative prime minister.

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# No case for a federal election

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**SECTION:** Opinion  
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**BYLINE:** Howard Elliott  
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Since the devil always lives in the details, it's best not to get too excited about this week's speech from the throne. At best, it's a directional indicator of where the Harper government wants to take the country.

That disclaimer aside, there is some reason for optimism, and no reason for panic or an election. What was revealed was a broad, largely moderate agenda. Prime Minister Stephen Harper seems to recognize the need to make this minority government work. The other parties should be as sensible.

There is nothing here that warrants toppling the government. The promise of broad tax cuts makes sense at a time when Ottawa continues to roll in surpluses. Senate reform, including limiting the terms of senators and allowing Canadians to choose them? What's not to like? Finalize settlements and apologize to natives abused in Indian residential schools? Long overdue.

Building an Arctic research station that will be on the leading edge of Arctic environmental issues, and also reinforce our northern sovereignty, makes sense. Allowing provinces to opt out of federal spending programs if they have comparable provincial initiatives is logical. The plan to prevent voters from casting ballots wearing veils or facial coverings won't please everyone, but is sensible. New measures to improve the quality and safety of imported food and products are in keeping with the times.

However, some contentious proposals could end up as confidence issues that trigger an election. An omnibus crime crackdown, playing to unfounded fears about rising crime rates, is acceptable in its specific proposals to toughen sentences for violent offences and impaired driving. But the peril of omnibus bills in general is their convenient ability to conceal more controversial measures woven inconspicuously into the fabric of the legislation.

Harper also made it clear he wants to extend Canada's Afghanistan mission to 2011, in a role vaguely outlined as support and training, as opposed to combat. There's no clear national appetite for that.

Abandoning the Kyoto Protocol was predictable, given this government's ideological disdain for the pact, and the fact that previous Liberal governments had no plan for achieving its targets. But Harper's alternative promises of reduced greenhouse gases by 2020 are dubious and bereft of detail. It's not clear there's a will to identify and implement achievable objectives.

Also missing is any sense of urgency around the plight of cities and related issues, such as the need for a transit strategy to get people out of cars and into more sustainable forms of transit.

On balance, there's no call to action here. That the NDP and Bloc Qu b cois plan to vote against the agenda is no surprise; they can't trigger an election, so can claim moral high ground without fear of reality intruding.

For the Liberals, the matter isn't as simple. Saddled with a shaky leader, financial disarray and near annihilation in Quebec, they're between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Under the circumstances, they should make all the appropriate expressions of concern and outrage, then get to work with Harper helping to move the country forward.

Editorials are written by members of the editorial board. They represent the position of the newspaper, not necessarily the individual author.

# Throne speech prelude to election? Broad tax cuts, anti-crime bill highlight Tories' new game plan

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CNS Norma Greenaway, Andrew Mayeda and Juliet O'Neill OTTAWA — The minority Conservative government has promised broad tax cuts and challenged the opposition parties to pass a massive anti-crime bill and accept his non-Kyoto approach to climate change in a throne speech that could become the opening volley in an election campaign.

NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe immediately vowed to oppose the speech, leaving it up to the Liberals to either throw the government a life line or vote to bring it down and force an election.

However, Liberal Leader Stephane Dion refused to immediately declare one way or the other. Under pressure from within his party, he criticized the speech, especially the "weakness" of the plans for tackling climate change, and predicted the caucus would have a "very lively" meeting today over what it wants to do.

"We know that Canadians want, as a priority, this Parliament to work. They don't want a third election in 3 1/2 years," he told reporters.

The speech, which outlined the government's legislative plans for the coming months, also pledged federal action to assert Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, including construction of a "world-class Arctic research station that will be on the cutting edge of arctic issues." Prime Minister Stephen Harper, long a critic of federal interference in areas of provincial jurisdiction, moved on a subject near and dear to the hearts of many Canadians, but Quebecers in particular.

His government vowed it would introduce legislation to limit the use of federal spending power for new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

On the hot-button issue of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, the government renewed an old promise to allow a vote on the future of the mission after its current term expires in February 2009.

On the environment, the government said it would take action to combat climate change and cut greenhouse gases, but in a direct contradiction of the position taken by the opposition parties, it reiterated its view that "Canada's emissions cannot be brought to the level required under the Kyoto Protocol." It also reiterated its election campaign promise to cut one more percentage point from the GST during its mandate.

The throne speech was delivered Tuesday night by Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean in the Senate chamber, an ornate, wood-panelled room that was packed with MPs, senators and members of the media. Among the special guests was Jodie Lamers Worden, the widow of an RCMP officer killed last week in Hay River, N.W.T.

It marked the first time the speech was delivered during prime-time viewing hours on television.

The government said it was committed to demonstrating Canada's international leadership through concrete action, rather than rhetoric, and to supporting those who share the values of democracy and freedom.

In that spirit, it announced it would ask Parliament to confer honorary citizenship on Myanmar dissident Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who has been under house arrest for years.

The law-and-order package would combine at least five pieces of legislation that have already been studied to varying degrees by MPs and senators, but which died on the order paper when the government opted to prorogue Parliament and begin a new session.

By putting all the bills into one giant omnibus bill, the government hopes to put more pressure on opposition parties to go along with the government rather than risk losing all the measures because they don't like one or two items.

"Canadians expect prompt passage of this crucial legislation," it said.

The most controversial proposal would amend the Criminal Code so that those found guilty of three violent or sexual offences would have to convince a judge why they shouldn't be branded a dangerous offender. The Liberals had opposed that in the past.

The other measures would stiffen penalties for impaired driving, raise the age of sexual consent to 16 from 14, impose stricter bail conditions for those who commit crimes with guns, and also impose mandatory prison terms for gun crimes.

The speech is considered a confidence matter, meaning the government could fall, and the country would be plunged into an election if all three opposition parties voted against it. There are three possible confidence votes stemming from the speech over the next week or so.

It was the second throne speech by the Harper-led Conservatives since they won power almost 21 months ago.

Layton took strong exception to the government's plans to ignore the Kyoto targets, and what he said was its failure to address poverty in this country. "We have a mandate to oppose the direction Mr.

Harper is taking. It's wrong," he told reporters.

Duceppe, who rushed to speak to reporters before Jean had finished reading the speech, said the speech missed the mark on the environment, the economy, protecting provincial rights and Afghanistan.

"On Afghanistan, not only are they not proposing to put an end on that mission by February, 2009 — we're talking about staying there until 2011," he told reporters. "And they are putting more money into the military. Kyoto? They are abandoning Kyoto. They are following (U.S. President George) Bush — we can't support them on that." Harper moved last week to address one of the hottest issues hanging over Parliament, namely the future of Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan beyond its scheduled expiry in February 2009. He appointed a five-person panel, led by John Manley, a former Liberal cabinet minister, to come forward with recommendations by the end of January.

The government, which has 126 of the 308 seats in the Commons, would fall only if the opposition parties united to bring it down.

The Liberals have 96 seats, the Bloc Quebecois has 49, and the NDP has 30. There are three independents and four vacancies.

Throne speech prelude to election? Broad tax cuts, anti-crime bill highlight Tories' new game plan



# Dion backs away from felling Tories But Harper pushes contentious justice bill

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CP Wire OTTAWA — A weakened Stephane Dion pulled the country back from the brink of a fall election Wednesday, only to have Stephen Harper push him toward another political precipice.

The Liberal leader told the House of Commons that he won't bring down Harper's minority Conservative government over the throne speech.

Instead, he introduced a lengthy amendment — carefully worded to ensure that neither the Bloc Quebecois nor the NDP will support it. Should the amendment fail, Dion said Liberals will abstain from voting on the main throne speech motion next week, thus assuring the government's survival.

It appeared to be exactly what the prime minister wanted to hear.

Harper immediately pressed home his advantage, declaring that his first act in the new parliamentary session will be to introduce a sweeping justice bill.

He said he'll allow no substantive opposition amendments to the bill and he'll make it a confidence matter, meaning the government will fall if all three opposition parties vote against it.

The Tackling Violent Crime Act will include elements of several pieces of legislation that didn't pass in the last session, including provisions on violent gun crimes, the age of sexual consent, impaired driving, bail rules, and dangerous offenders.

Meanwhile, Churchill Mayor Mike Spence hopes Harper will choose the port as the site of the "world-class Arctic research station" promised in the throne speech Tuesday. The centre is to be on the cutting edge of Arctic issues, including environmental science and resource development, the throne speech said.

"We're hoping there is an opportunity here for Churchill," Spence said.

Winnipeg Centre NDP MP Pat Martin says the federal government made a "declaration of war" in the throne speech when it pledged to give Prairie farmers a choice in where to sell their grain. By law, they now must sell it through the Canadian Wheat Board.

"He's dropped the gauntlet once again and I can promise him we're going to give him the fight of his life," Martin said.

"Pat Martin may want a war; we don't," replied Treasury Board President Vic Toews, Manitoba's senior cabinet minister. "Our government wants to respect the democratic rights of western Canadian farmers." Dion spent almost 45 minutes Wednesday lambasting the throne speech before finally conceding the Liberals won't defeat the government over it.

He accused the Tories of abandoning the Kyoto climate-change protocol, being unclear on the Afghanistan military mission, and ignoring the needs of the poor. But he also noted that Canadians don't want another election now.

"The Official Opposition certainly remains very critical of the throne speech, but never before has a federal government fallen on the basis of a throne speech," he said.

"We will propose amendments, and we will not make this government fall on its throne speech, which would cause a third general election in four years — something Canadians have clearly shown that they do not want." NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe reiterated their intention to vote against the throne speech.

Layton blasted Dion for failing to stand up for his principles and tried to goad him into voting against the throne speech.

"That's what the NDP will be doing — showing leadership." Harper openly mocked Dion's face-saving position, taken in the midst of internal party chaos and rising doubts about his leadership.

"I must say it reminded me a little bit of the professor who goes through your term paper and marks all over it everything he disagrees with, but then passes you anyway," Harper said.

He said the government will consider passage of the throne speech as an endorsement of its agenda: "The Opposition can't allow it to pass, and then expect to obstruct our core priorities." The Liberal amendment calls on the government to accept the blame for failing to meet Kyoto targets, suggesting that the previous Liberal government was on track to do so. Both Layton and Duceppe scoffed at that assertion.

The amendment also calls on the government to inform NATO that Canada will end its combat mission in Kandahar on schedule in February 2009. It does not call for a full military pullout from Afghanistan.

Liberal sources said the amendment is a face-saving measure designed give voice to the party's objections to the throne speech while ensuring that the government doesn't fall.

Dion had to be talked into the gambit. Sources said he was initially among the strongest hawks in caucus, wanting to force an election rather than risk hurting his reputation as a champion of the environment by supporting Harper's anti-Kyoto message.

— The Canadian Press, with files from staff {Ottawa ONT}