

## SABRE RATTLING IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

With the House of Commons set to reconvene – at last – with the Harper government delivering its Speech from the Throne, our Prime Minister considered it an opportune moment last week to hold his first press conference since taking office. And the reason for this momentous event? It was for his Opposition in the House to take notice he will govern, and he will set forth in the Speech and in the legislation that follows a Conservative agenda on Afghanistan, on justice legislation, on a whole range of issues that will qualify as confidence votes. Confidence votes mean that if there is enough opposition from the Bloc, the NDP and from my own party and just one of these do not pass, we will head into another election. This was Mr. Harper throwing down the gauntlet: vote against us on the issues that matter and you take Canadians to the polls.

All this sabre rattling conveniently sidesteps some uncomfortable facts. In regard to justice legislation, a so-called tough-on-crime agenda, this government introduced seven bills that I and most of my Liberal colleagues eagerly wanted passed through committee and into the books. So much for Liberals being soft on crime. In fact we decried their being held up in process and used for strategic purposes in the course of the legislative session. We were also eager to see this government finally commit to more police officers, to work with our cities and provincial governments on real crime prevention strategies, not rhetoric. The City of Vancouver has spent more money on officers than this entire federal government has.

We also wanted real action on health care wait times, one of those 5 promises you don't hear about anymore. Because it didn't happen.

We hoped for child care spaces to be built with that plan of theirs that could only provide Canadian families a one hundred dollar cheque per month. What has this meant for BC? Not one new space.

We wanted something, anything that would amount to a real plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions before it is too late. I don't need to tell you what we have in its place. It is too saddening and depressing.

And we still want a sense that this government can ensure our soldiers, our ordinary heroes, a real exit strategy in Afghanistan for 2009. Mr. Harper was once open to at least responding to the will of the Canadian people on this. Now he sounds as though he would rather let a conservative caucus decide on this issue.

These are not the proposals of an intransigent opposition. Intransigent was the filibustering displayed by this government last summer, when they preferred to develop a game plan to tie up committees rather than see them moving forward on real legislation, and on real questions crucial to Canadians. I have spoken in this column of my own experience trying to get to the bottom of what this government knew about the treatment of Afghan detainees, to note one particularly egregious example.

Governing is too great a responsibility to be reduced to sabre rattling and election strategizing over consensus building. Yet this is what we face in the coming legislative session. It brings to mind that adage of being very careful what you wish for, indeed.



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