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FIRST READ IN THE HILL TIMES."**

—Toronto Star's Susan Delacourt



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- ◉ ADVERTISING
- ◉ ABOUT HT
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- ◉ HTWORK.CA

**PUBLIC SECTION**

- Cover Stories
- Policy Briefings
- Letters
- Classifieds
- Careers
- Vacation
- Links
- Home Page

**MEMBERS SECTION**

- Login
- Weekly PDFs
- Archives
- Surveys
- Lists
- FAQ

**NEWS**

- News Stories
- Heard on the Hill
- Legislative Column
- Hill Climbers
- Civil Circles

**OPINIONS**

- Editorial
- Op-eds
- Letters

**COLUMNISTS**

- Andrew Cardozo
- Richard Cl  rroux
- Jenefer Curtis
- Philippe Gagnon
- Chantal H  bert
- David Jones
- Joe Jordan
- Warren Kinsella
- Tom Korski
- Brad Lavigne
- Don Lenihan
- Denis Massicotte
- Arthur Milnes
- Angelo Persichilli
- Tim Powers
- Ken Rubin
- Mike Storeshaw
- Leslie Swartman
- James Travers

**FEATURES**

- Policy Briefings
- Spin Doctors
- Parliamentary
- Calendar





The Hill Times, August 10, 2009

## Economy to be next election's ballot box question

**Conservatives confident Canadians will give them credit for 'prudent' handling of the recession.**

By Abbas Rana

The ballot box question for the next election will again be about the economy and Conservatives are confident that with the Bank of Canada's recent announcement that the country is out of recession, Canadians will give their party credit for "prudently" handling the tough economic times.

"The ballot question I think will be, 'Who is best to guide the country through what's left of the recession and back to prosperity?'" One top Conservative told *The Hill Times*, adding that the Tory record of managing the economy in the last three years prove that Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, Alta.) has handled it well.

"He's an economist, he's shown over three years that we've had very prudent management of the economy. Harper's not flamboyant, he's very careful with people's money. So, I think he'll get the credit."

Election talk reappeared in media reports last week after Liberals and Conservatives accused each other of not being serious in resolving the Employment Insurance issue. Both parties have set up a "blue ribbon" panel consisting of six members—three each from the Conservative and Liberal parties—to study the EI reform issue, come up with proposals and report to Parliament by Sept. 28. Parliament is scheduled to return after its summer recess on Sept. 14 and following the tabling of the EI reform report, Liberals will get an opposition day before the end of the month. Liberals have been hinting since the end of the last session that if they are not satisfied with the EI report, they might table a non-confidence motion.

Meanwhile, last week, a Statistics Canada report indicated that 45,000 Canadians lost their jobs in the month of July. After this report came out on Friday, Aug. 7, Liberals questioned Mr. Carney's assertion that the recession is over in Canada.

"[If you look at] this morning's figure of unemployment, I don't think that anybody would consider a recession over if in the last month 45,000 more jobs were lost," said Ontario Liberal Sen. David Smith who is also the campaign co-chair in an interview with *The Hill Times* last Friday. He added that in a minority government, there's always a possibility of an election but the Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Ont.) wants to make this Parliament work.

Despite Mr. Carney's recent announcement about the economy, Conservative Cabinet ministers have also been careful in media interviews to confirm that the recession is over.

Pollster Greg Lyle of Innovative Research said that Conservatives are following the right policy of not declaring that the recession is over and the Canadian economy is back on the path of recovery as people won't accept this until they themselves start to experience the dividends of the economic recovery.

"I don't think people feel it's over. Until jobs start moving up, housing prices start moving up that sort of thing. I don't think the average person is going to believe the Conservatives if they go around saying 'We won, we won'," said Mr. Lyle and later added that Tories are following the right communications strategy by saying more work needs to be done.

Mr. Lyle said the Tories are right in saying, "'We're encouraged that Carney has made this announcement that he has but frankly we see more work to be done.' That's the absolute right position to take."

Conservative strategist Tim Powers in an interview said that Canadians want all parties



to work together to fix the economy and an election at this juncture will be counter productive.

"The only people talking about an election are some self-interested opposition politicians. It defies logic that there should be an election in the fall. The average person who lives outside the Parliament Hill precinct wants their elected officials to focus on the economy and the battles we still have. Political stability is arguably more vital now than it was in June the last time we had this shadow election dance. As we slowly creep out of this recession we don't need to waste 300 million on an election," said Mr. Powers.

He criticized Mr. Ignatieff for failing to offer any policies that could give Canadians an opportunity to make up their mind whether they agree with Mr. Ignatieff or not.

"I have no idea what Michael Ignatieff is thinking. He has practically been invisible all summer and has offered no real policy prescriptions. The Liberals have yet to develop a narrative to take to the public other than we are Liberals and we should be back in power. Not sure that will prime the pump of the public."

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*The Hill Times*

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