

# HARPER'S WOUNDS ARE SELF-INFLICTED

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been dismissive of the criticism of his decision to prorogue Parliament. He has suggested that it is just “idle chatter that is out of touch with the real priorities of Canadians.”

According to the latest polls, however, ordinary Canadians are upset about prorogation and they are taking it out on Harper and his party. What was once a double-digit lead for the Conservatives over the opposition Liberals has shrunk to single digits. The pollsters cite prorogation as the reason.

How did a heretofore obscure parliamentary manoeuvre – used by past prime ministers without much fuss – spark such a political uproar? One possible answer is that Harper’s rationale for proroguing keeps shifting.

Initially, we were told by the Prime Minister’s press secretary that the government needed time to “recalibrate” and “consult” before bringing in a throne speech and budget in March.

Then Harper offered a new explanation: “I don’t think it makes sense for a session of Parliament to go on and on.”

That morphed into the government needing time “to continue to deliver the economic measures that are being delivered here and elsewhere across the country as part of the economic action plan.”

Finally, this week Harper said that if he had allowed Parliament to continue sitting through the winter, there would have been continuous votes of confidence and election rumours. “That’s the kind of instability I think that markets are actually worried about,” he said.

Also this week we heard from Tom Flanagan, Harper’s former campaign manager. “Everybody knows that Parliament was prorogued in order to shut down the Afghan inquiry, and the trouble is that the government doesn’t want to explain why that was necessary,” he said. Flanagan also referred to the government’s explanations for prorogation as “childish talking points.” (With friends like these, Harper doesn’t need enemies.)



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As the story keeps changing, public trust in Harper's position is eroding. Rather than give Harper the benefit of the doubt on prorogation, Canadians are asking the question raised in the Liberal ads: "What is he covering up?"

The question may be unfair but Harper has brought it upon himself. Or, as Flanagan said, "it's a self-created problem."

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