

EDITORIAL

PARLIAMENT DOES MATTER

Globe and Mail columnist Jeffrey Simpson raised a good point in one of his columns last week when he stated the painfully obvious. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's "prorogation was about control of the public agenda." Period. Prime Minister Harper didn't shut down Parliament for two months to allow the government to "recalibrate." He shut it down to "deprive the other parties of a chance to do what they do best, make a racket." It's simple, but true.

Declared Mr. Simpson: "Obviously, no Prime Minister can control everything that happens or is reported in the media, and he cannot shut up entirely his political opponents. What he can do is use the powers of his office, and the budgets allocated by his government, to limit, where possible, his foes' opportunities to get attention."

So the governing Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats took their political pitches to the Hill to show who's working harder while Parliament is shut down for two months. Good for them.

The Liberals and NDP saw that the government would be spending the next two months making government spending announcements and holding press conferences and realized that that couldn't happen. And they're right. The opposition parties should not allow the governing Conservatives to steal all the limelight. They should be working and if that means holding roundtables in Ottawa, bring it on.

While Conservatives blitz Canada with budget talks, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon, Defence Minister Peter MacKay and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney and their departments continued on Canada's humanitarian response to Haiti, Cabinet ministers announced millions in stimulus spending, Heritage Minister James Moore hosted a preview of the Vancouver 2010 Canada Pavilion in Vancouver, Industry Minister Tony Clement delivered a speech in Saskatoon about the economy and Canadian industry, Fisheries Minister Gail Shea got a pie in the face and later met with anglers and hunters.

The NDP and the Liberals kept busy too, and got some traction. The NDP talked about the Afghanistan detainee "coverup" issue, Canada's food safety problems, Canada's copyright legislation, and the call for government action to save the pension plans for such companies as AbitibiBowater, Fraser Papers and Nortel.

The Liberals held a roundtable on governance and summoned Linda Keen, former president and CEO of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; Peter Tinsley, former chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission; Paul Kennedy, former chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP; France Houle, law teacher at the University of Montreal; and Ned Franks, a leading expert on Parliament. The Liberals also held a national water caucus to talk about the impact of mining tailings on Canada's lakes and a roundtable on PTSD in the Canadian Forces. All these issues are important.

The MPs are standing up for Parliament and trying to show that their work does matter. It's their Parliament too.

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