

PM will get his wish

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Looking at that party's body language since [Stephen Harper] set out to terminate his current mandate, it is as if a lobotomized brain governed the Liberals' right and left hands. While one hand has been pushing Canadians to vote the Conservatives out of office in a fall election, the other is trying to stop Harper from actually calling one. In spite of that, there are lingering questions as to the Liberal election- readiness. But Stockwell Day and Stephen Harper, [Dion]'s two immediate Official Opposition predecessors, had barely emerged from a leadership convention when they had to enter their first campaign. By comparison, Dion has had 20 months to prepare for an election. The existence of the fixed-election-dates legislation is the only argument that could turn the imminent chat between Harper and [Michalle Jean] into more than the formality that past practice would normally dictate. But it is not really up to the Governor General to give a law the quasi-constitutional status that Parliament could not or, for that matter, to hold a prime minister accountable for his broken promises.

ABSTRACT

[...] the Liberal leader made no secret of the fact that he was using the summer to ramp his party up for a fall campaign.

FULL TEXT

Sometime before the end of next week, Prime Minister Stephen Harper is expected to ask Governor General Michalle Jean to set aside his legislated commitment to fixed election dates and dissolve the 39th Parliament.

On balance, no one should expect Jean to stand between the Prime Minister and his wish for an October vote.

Here's why.

Harper's government has outlasted all previous federal minority regimes. It is well past the 18-month average lifespan of a Canadian minority government.

There is no substitute coalition to the Conservative party ready to step in to take the current Parliament to its legislated end in October 2009.

Neither the NDP nor the Bloc Qubcois has expressed interest in propping up an alternative Liberal minority regime until next year's prescribed deadline. Their preference is for an election. Over the past year, they have consistently voted against the government on confidence issues. Looking to a now-unlikely fall session, both Jack Layton and Gilles Duceppe have ruled out a change of course.

It can be argued that the Harper government actually lost the confidence of Parliament some time ago. Since the 2007 budget, no opposition party has been willing to support the bulk of its pivotal legislation.

The only reason the government is still in place is an extraordinary Liberal decision to abstain from key votes. But if a Parliament is about more than the government, then the Liberal failure to act as a full-fledged Official Opposition has made the dynamics of this one dysfunctional.

The dysfunction that is rooted in the current Liberal leadership predicament is in evidence even when Parliament is not sitting.

Looking at that party's body language since Harper set out to terminate his current mandate, it is as if a lobotomized brain governed the Liberals' right and left hands. While one hand has been pushing Canadians to vote

the Conservatives out of office in a fall election, the other is trying to stop Harper from actually calling one. It was just two months ago that Stphane Dion unveiled his Green Shift plan to deal with climate change. At the time, the Liberal leader made no secret of the fact that he was using the summer to ramp his party up for a fall campaign. Since then, the Liberals have systematically revved up their anti-Conservative rhetoric. In spite of that, there are lingering questions as to the Liberal election- readiness. But Stockwell Day and Stephen Harper, Dion's two immediate Official Opposition predecessors, had barely emerged from a leadership convention when they had to enter their first campaign. By comparison, Dion has had 20 months to prepare for an election. Over that period, he has repeatedly claimed control over the timing of the next campaign, blowing hot and cold on the notion of one. In fact, the fixed- election-dates legislation always came with a prime ministerial escape hatch. It left alone the vice-regal power to dissolve Parliament; it can't be changed without a constitutional amendment. That is convenient for Harper but it is also in line with the realities of a parliamentary system. The existence of the fixed-election-dates legislation is the only argument that could turn the imminent chat between Harper and Jean into more than the formality that past practice would normally dictate. But it is not really up to the Governor General to give a law the quasi-constitutional status that Parliament could not or, for that matter, to hold a prime minister accountable for his broken promises. Chantal Hebert is a syndicated columnist for the Toronto Star. She is a regular contributor to the opinion section.

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