



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES

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Dear Constituents:

Thank you for your communications with my two offices regarding the political developments in Ottawa last week. Events have been changing literally by the minute. I hope you will find my response worthy of consideration.

As you know by now, the Governor General has acceded to Mr. Harper's request to dissolve Parliament.

This was an **extraordinary concession** to an **extraordinary demand** prompted by an **extraordinary collapse** of the government's "fiscal update" in Parliament. All of this happened within 14 days of the resumption of parliamentary business, 52 days after an election, which, in turn, followed four months of summer recess. In effect, **Canada has been without a Parliament to hold its government to account for six months in the face of some of the most blistering financial and economic crises in recent history.**

Canadians rightly demand(ed) an action plan by their government, given some of the worst conditions confronting their standard of living (and quality of life): weakening of our financial infrastructures, erosion of our manufacturing base, collapse of our resource industries, decline in the value of our dollar and so on. Governments everywhere around the world – and, in particular, the "richer" G20 – proposed and enacted "stimulus packages" reflecting 2% of their gross domestic product.

For example, the USA put forward a plan for financial stabilization involving \$700 billion; President-Elect, Barack Obama, proposed an additional \$800 billion infrastructure renewal programme; the European Union rushed to authorize \$450 billion in similar expenditures; China's initial response was a \$600 billion plan. All of these governments are anxious to protect the jobs of their citizens, and, to avoid an exodus of job creating industries to countries whose governments were developing economic strategies to protect domestic interests.

Our own government's "**mini-budget/economic update**", presented on November 27, contained little more than admonitions for Canadians to engage in belt tightening. The Opposition parties responded with a firm suggestion that this **apparent dereliction of duty** would result in an expression of non-confidence. A political crisis emerged.

The Prime Minister could have chosen to negotiate with the opposition parties to avert such a defeat so soon after the election. He had, in fact, previously negotiated deals with both the Bloc and the NDP first to bring down the Martin government and subsequently with the Bloc to stay in power in the last Parliament. He chose instead to threaten to dismiss Parliament and took measures to ensure that the newly minted Parliament would be dissolved at his pleasure.

Of necessity, his former partners approached the Liberals to fashion an alternative plan for the Governor General to consider. What emerged was a 30 month, written Agreement, co-signed by the Liberals and the NDP, based on specific economic directions coupled with the principle of fiscal responsibility. The Bloc, in its turn, also in writing, promised not to take any steps that would lead to a defeat on a non-confidence vote of any budgetary measures reflecting that economic plan for 18 months. **In our Parliamentary system of government, that Entente, signed by 161 Members of Parliament, constitutes a majority of the seats in the 308 seat House of Commons, and a legitimate, constitutional alternative to the current government!**

The Governor General, for reasons which she has not shared, but which no-one will contest, has decided **to grant Mr. Harper a reprieve from that reality** and from "the principle of majority rules". For another two months at least, Canadians will be without voices in Parliament to keep the government "responsible and accountable" to the people.

Clearly, from a political perspective, this is a time of sober reflection. In countries where democratic traditions have followed a different course or where the "political culture" is less deferential, the government's actions would have been accompanied by a seizure of airports and occupation of press and media outlets. Fortunately, **our system of government is structured to permit, if not encourage, the coming together of "coalitions of interests", without necessarily having to go to election!**

Open debate on issues, reasoned planning for our country's and citizens' interests have been displaced by **invective and visceral ad hominem attacks**. How so reflective of weak positions! In light of the week's developments in the hockey world, one is tempted to muse that the "jilted lover" syndrome has gripped the levers of political debate as Conservatives dump all over their former partners in the Bloc.

The verbal skirmishing preceding the Governor General's decision has **stoked the fires of dormant regional divisions and fanned the flames of racial divides** in the country. National Unity, and its fragility, are once again front and centre today. It will take political energy and acumen to set things right.

Who knows what next week or next month will bring? The current leadership, with the Prime Minister as its chief architect, is responsible for this imbroglio; and, name-calling and the raising of bogey-men is its only defense. Meanwhile, looming and current economic disasters are threatening the well-being of all Canadians. We deserve better!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Volpe". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being prominent.

The Hon. Joe Volpe, P.C., M.P.
Eglinton-Lawrence