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Leeds-Grenville Liberal Candidate, Marjory Loveys, Comments on Parliament's Closure.

## Steven Harper Adds to Parliamentary Dysfunction

"Prorogue;" is a parliamentary term that has become hotly debated in the past week since Prime Minister Stephen Harper prorogued Parliament until March 3rd.

Prorogation ends the business of Parliament, shutting down not only the House of Commons and Senate but also the Parliamentary committees where detailed debates take place.

There are several aspects of Mr. Harper's decision to close down Parliament for over two months that are disquieting, to say the least. It delays legislation, stops scrutiny of the Afghan detainee issue and renders Parliament unable to quickly respond to an emergency. Most importantly, it removes the only forum for Members of Parliament from all Parties to hear from Canadians and forge a consensus on measures for the up-coming budget.

First, prorogation requires legislation that is being debated in Parliament to start the process all over again unless there is unanimous consent to do otherwise. Prorogation will delay if not derail many bills forcefully promoted by Mr. Harper as urgent and crucial, for example bills that he argues will reduce crime.

In the past, whenever legitimate debate "delayed" the progress of a single piece of government legislation, Stephen Harper was the first to blame the opposition. But now, in a move of paramount hypocrisy, he is stalling 35 pieces of legislation currently in progress.

Second, Parliamentary scrutiny of the Afghanistan Detainee issue by a Parliamentary Committee will cease. There has been much speculation that this was the real motive behind his decision. Given that Mr. Harper has also instructed Conservative MPs to boycott Parliament's Special Committee on Afghanistan and defied Parliament's vote to release key documents, I agree with this assessment.

However, in my view the impact of the **duration** of the closure of Parliament deserves much more attention.

Parliament will be mute until March. During this time it will be unable to quickly respond to any emergency that arises, and open debate by Members of Parliament on important issues, including the upcoming budget, will cease.

If events create the need for Parliamentary action – for example dealing with developments in Afghanistan or a work stoppage that is causing hardship for Canadians – the process of recalling Parliament, electing a Speaker, etc. will slow any response. For this reason past governments have learned to prorogue Parliament just a few days before it is scheduled to be recalled. Mr

Harper did not take this precaution. He clearly does not care if Parliament is Missing In Action for months on end.

Before each budget Parliamentary Committees normally hear from a broad cross-section of Canadians and openly debate the ideas they hear. Their advice is given to the Minister of Finance well before the budget is written.

Mr. Harper's stated intent is to recall Parliament on March 3 and have a budget the very next day. This will be an important budget that must help us deal with the effects of the recession, address the deficit and climate change, and take measures to improve our pensions.

The overwhelming view I hear when talking to citizens of Leeds-Grenville is that they want Parliament to work, and the Parties to work together. Parliamentary committees are the one place where all Parties call witnesses and hear the same input from the public, and have the opportunity to debate and reach consensus.

By removing this opportunity for MPs to work together, Mr. Harper is making it harder for Parliament to work.

It is this unnecessarily long time that Parliament will be closed that will impact Canadians the most. It suggests that Mr. Harper is placing his partisan interests in shutting down uncomfortable questions about his decisions on our Afghan mission ahead of the interests of Canadians.

In leaving Parliament unable to quickly respond to emergencies or to listen to the public and openly debate their concerns about the recession, the deficit, climate change and pensions, he is preventing our elected Members of Parliament from doing their work.

Stephen Harper's 63 day shutdown of Parliamentary activity brings his total to 148 days during just four years in office, eclipsing Jean Chrétien's 145 days of prorogation over ten full years. And Jean Chretien's 145 days included 82 days for the transition of power to Mr. Martin.

I can only conclude that Mr. Harper sees Parliament as an inconvenience rather than an essential voice of the Canadian people.