

Opposition parties ignoring election outcome: Raitt

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Michaëlle Jean that she should call on Dion to form a new government as the parties make up a combined 55 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons.

Conservative Halton MP and Natural Resources Minister Lisa Raitt, less than two months into her first term of office as a politician, said the Liberals, NDP and Bloc were ignoring the strengthened minority mandate given to Harper in the October 14 federal election.



Lisa Raitt

"Where we are today is because of the NDP and the Bloc determining many weeks ago to get rid of Stephen Harper whatever the cost," Raitt told the *Champion*.

She was alluding to a taped recording released by the Conservatives this past weekend in which NDP Leader Jack Layton appears to acknowledge he had spoken to Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe "a long time ago" about a possible move to get Harper and his party out of power.

Raitt echoed Harper's comments in Question Period Tuesday, challenging Liberal leader Dion to another election.

"(We) will use every means possible to make sure this attack on Canada, this attack on democracy is not going to be allowed," she said.

Moves to form the coalition government moved quickly after Finance Minister Jim Flaherty's economic update Thursday. Opposition parties were incensed by three aspects of the statement: the lack of what they believe is an adequate stimulus package to help Canada's faltering economy; a temporary freeze on the right of public servants

to strike; and the elimination of \$1.95-per-vote federal subsidies for political parties.

Following the update, the Conservatives moved swiftly to contain the damage of what outspoken Halton Liberal candidate Garth Turner, who lost his seat to Raitt in the past election, has called a "mean-spirited" economic plan.

The government announced over the weekend that it wouldn't follow through on its plan to ban public service strikes and that it wouldn't yet reduce the subsidies for political parties. In perhaps the most important announcement, Flaherty said Sunday the Conservatives would table its 2009 budget January 27, two months ahead of schedule, and it would include an economic stimulus not mentioned in the economic update, featuring plans to help Ontario's struggling auto sector. That stimulus would be about two per cent of Canada's GDP, Raitt said.

None of those reversals has dissuaded the opposition parties from their plans to knock the Conservatives from power.

Steve Savage, leader of the Liberal riding association for Halton, said he was "overjoyed" at the political turn of events.

"Harper's disastrous two-year reign has ended and Canada can finally begin to address important economic matters," he said.

"While other countries are proactively planning efforts to shelter their people from the global economic fallout, (Harper) and his team stand idle and ineffective."

Political observer and author Peter Russell said there are several possible outcomes to the current political gamesmanship in Ottawa. One is that Harper asks the governor general to announce a new federal election if he loses the confidence vote. The next is that the governor general recognizes the petition of the three opposition parties

and asks Dion to form a new government. The final option is that Harper asks the governor general to temporarily suspend or prorogue the current Legislative session before the confidence vote and recall Parliament just before Flaherty is to release the budget.

The Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto and author of "Two Cheers for a Minority Government" said Harper's govern-

ment doesn't have the right to govern simply because it garnered the largest percentage of the popular vote in the last election.

"We're a Parliamentary system," he said. "If Mr. Harper can't command (the Parliament's) confidence, we must have a PM that can command its confidence."

Tim Foran may be reached at tforan@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



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Correction

An article in Friday's *Champion* entitled 'Town seeks funding for \$40 million arts centre and library' incorrectly stated the amount of funding being sought from the provincial and federal governments.

The Town of Milton is seeking \$7.5 million from each of the two upper governments.

We apologize for the error and any inconvenience it may have caused.



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