

DODGING A SPRING ELECTION

Introduction

Focus

This *CBC News in Review* story focuses on the political parties, leaders, issues, and strategies at play as the minority Conservative government and the opposition confront the possibility of a federal election in 2008.

Quote

"There are some of my colleagues who would rather have their kidneys harvested without anaesthetic than go to an election."
— former Conservative-turned-Liberal MP Garth Turner (*CBC News in Review* video)

While the attention of most Canadians remained focused on the drama of the presidential contest taking place in the U.S., this country's own political scene was beginning to heat up in the early months of 2008. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's minority Conservative government was facing a number of challenges to its survival in Parliament, where the combined votes of all the opposition party members could defeat it and force a federal election. Issues such as the 2008 budget, the extension of Canada's military commitment in Afghanistan, and the government's insistence that the Liberal-dominated Senate pass its new anti-crime legislation all posed the real possibility of becoming matters of confidence—meaning that if the Conservatives failed to pass them, they would be obliged to resign. To some observers, it appeared that the government was daring the opposition to defeat it in the belief that Harper's popularity with voters and the perceived weakness of his Liberal opponents might result in a majority for his party.

At the same time, the opposition, in particular the Liberals, were raising a number of potentially damaging accusations against the Harper government in the hope that they would erode its popularity with voters on the brink of a spring election. The first of these was the allegation that Harper had sought to buy the support of the now-deceased Independent MP Chuck Cadman during a close no-confidence vote against the then-Liberal minority government of former prime minister Paul Martin in May 2005.

Then there was the issue of "NAFTA-gate"—the charge that the Conservatives had revealed secret conversations about the North American Free Trade

Agreement government officials had held with U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama, with the intention of harming his campaign. Finally, like a ghost from the past, former Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney was again in the news, testifying before a parliamentary committee about the "Airbus scandal" of the 1980s and his questionable financial dealings with German businessman Karl-Heinz Schreiber. Mulroney's continuing unpopularity with voters, coupled with the fact that he was a Conservative, posed a potential image problem for Harper, even though his party had long distanced itself from the widely reviled former prime minister.

Although the opposition kept up the pressure against the Harper government on these and other issues, the likelihood of a spring election, which had appeared almost certain as 2008 dawned, began to fade. The budget of Finance Minister Jim Flaherty was introduced in February and was approved by Parliament over the opposition of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. The crime bill was passed, and a decision was made to extend Canada's troop commitment in Afghanistan to 2011 from 2009. Stéphane Dion's Liberals adopted the unusual and somewhat controversial tactic of abstaining en masse from parliamentary votes, making it impossible for Harper's government to be defeated. Dion adopted this strategy of playing for time and not provoking an immediate election for various reasons: the party was not ready for an election and there were grave concerns within Liberal ranks about Dion's popularity with voters, especially in Quebec. While opinion polls indicated that most Canadians did not favour an early election on the heels of two previous federal campaigns in 2004

Quote

"We will decide when the election will come. We will choose the trigger."

— Stéphane Dion
(*Toronto Star*,
March 13, 2008)

and 2006, the other opposition parties, especially Jack Layton's NDP, accused the Liberals of cowardice and caving in to Harper's political agenda.

At the same time, most polls indicated that if a new election were to be held, the results might not be much different from those of the last one, with yet another minority government in the cards.

The only wild card was the rise of the Green Party, which currently holds no seats in Parliament. Its candidates were competitive with the Conservatives and NDP in four federal by-elections held in March 2008 to fill vacancies in the House of Commons. Even if the Greens

were unable to win any seats, their increased vote totals might influence many close races across the country. The by-election results also contained some good news for the Liberals, who held three of the ridings, and elected two former leadership candidates, Bob Rae and Martha Hall-Findlay in Toronto. However, the Conservatives were successful in taking a seat from the Liberals in Manitoba. The mixed results of the by-elections, representing no clear trend in voters' preferences, were further proof that a federal election was beginning to appear increasingly unlikely any time before the fall of 2008.

To Consider

1. What were the main political issues that threatened to provoke a federal election in the spring of 2008? How were they resolved?
2. What allegations were the opposition parties making against the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper?
3. Why is a minority government always vulnerable to defeat in the House of Commons in a no-confidence vote?
4. Why did the Liberals decide to abstain from voting against the government in the House of Commons in order to avoid the calling of an election?
5. If a federal election were to be held soon, what do you think the results would be, and why?
6. Which party would you most likely support in an election? Explain your choice.

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Video Review

Part I

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. Complete the chart below.

Name of Political Party	Number of Seats in Parliament	Name of Leader

2. What is meant by the term *minority government*? Why does a minority government make the possibility of an early election greater?

3. What changes in legislation are included in the government's new anti-crime bill?

4. What political party holds most of the seats in the Canadian Senate?

5. Why did some political observers believe that Harper's Conservatives wanted an early election?

6. What compromise was reached between the Conservatives and Liberals on the issue of Canada's troop commitment in Afghanistan?

Did you know . . .

Several of the leading candidates for the Liberal leadership in 2006 are still paying off huge debts from that campaign, including the winner, Stéphane Dion.

7. Why were the Liberals reluctant to trigger an early election by voting with the Bloc and NDP against Harper's government?

8. What is the name of the federal Minister of Finance? What new policies did he introduce in the federal budget of February 2008?

9. What was the response of the opposition parties to the budget? Which of them voted against it? Which did not? Why?

10. Why were the Liberals accused of being weak and indecisive as a result of their strategy of abstaining from confidence votes in the House of Commons?

11. How did some members of the Liberal parliamentary caucus feel about this strategy?

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The Federal Budget: Pro and Con

Did you know . . . Canada's first budget, tabled on December 7, 1867, had \$7.4-million in revenues and \$5.3-million in expenditures. Since 1867, there have been 143 budgets, as well as 22 mini-budgets, interim budgets, economic updates, and financial statements.

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty adopted a cautious approach to the nation's economic prospects when he brought down the Conservative government's third federal budget on February 26, 2008. Unlike previous budgets, this one did not contain any sweeping promises of further tax cuts or new federal spending initiatives. Instead, Flaherty sought to reassure Canadians in his budget speech that, despite growing concerns about the health of the U.S. economy, Canada's economic fundamentals were strong, and the likelihood of a serious recession was minimal. For this reason, he intended to "stay the course," introducing some minor changes to benefit various income groups but not pursuing any dramatic alternative economic policies. The centerpiece of the budget was a new tax-free savings account that would enable Canadians to deposit up to \$5 000 annually in a special account that would not require them to pay taxes on any money withdrawn from it. Unlike Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs), there would be no tax deduction for money deposited, but withdrawals would be tax free, which is not the case with RRSPs. This new savings vehicle, which was designed to benefit mainly middle- to upper-income people, would not be accessible until 2009.

In addition to this new savings plan, the budget also offered some modest debt relief to university students and a tax break for seniors who choose to work beyond the normal retirement age. There were also promises of small increases in federal money for aboriginal health, public transit, and climate change.

But the budget was noted more for what it did not contain than for what it

did. For example, there was nothing to assist the growing number of poor and unemployed people in Canada, and not nearly enough for major infrastructure programs that Canada's cities feel they need. There was also little assistance for the struggling automobile sector of the economy,—concentrated mainly in southern Ontario and the Montreal area—where many auto workers have been laid off. Both Quebec Premier Jean Charest and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty were quick to criticize Flaherty and the federal Conservatives for not offering enough relief to this beleaguered sector of the economy.

There was also not much in the way of new tax breaks or shelters for investors, who are becoming increasingly alarmed by the news of a growing credit crunch and mortgage meltdown south of the border.

For his part, Flaherty defended his government's steady-as-she-goes approach to managing the country's economic affairs, cautioning against expectations of further economic growth as the effects of the U.S. recession begin to be felt in Canada. In addition, the Conservatives had a more political reason for their reluctance to embark on new federal spending programs, since their strategy for the next election will be to tar their main opponents, Stéphane Dion's Liberals, with the brush of a "tax and spend" party. When the budget finally came to a vote in the House of Commons, it passed despite the opposition of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP because the Liberals abstained from voting on it. If they had joined the other opposition parties, then not only would the budget have been defeated but also the Conservative government

Did you know . . .

In the early 1990s, the federal government spent more on public debt charges than on any other single budget item. The federal government has recorded a budget surplus every year since 1997-98. The biggest federal budget surplus—\$19.9-billion—was recorded in the 2000-01 fiscal year.

itself, and a new election would have followed. According to parliamentary rules, the budget or any “money bill” a government brings before Parliament is viewed as a “confidence motion,” which it must be able to pass or resign if unable to secure a majority vote in its favour.

Here are some reactions to the federal budget by major political, business, and economic figures:

“Some would have us go down the path of higher spending, higher interest payments, and higher taxes, perhaps even an increase in the GST. But that approach is misguided. There is another way.” — Finance Minister Jim Flaherty

“With this budget, the Conservative government has begun to move in the direction that the Liberal opposition has been pushing. Under the circumstances, I don’t see enough in this budget that would justify that we precipitate an election that Canadians do not want for now.” — Opposition Leader Stéphane Dion

“It’s a budget that clearly fails the working families of Canada.” — NDP Leader Jack Layton

“Disadvantage Canada, that’s what this budget represents for Canada’s manufacturing and exporting sectors. We were very specific in what the nation’s most innovative industry needed and we received recycled ideas and pocket change at a critical time when we needed tangible solutions.” — Jay Myers, president, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association

“Big problems require big solutions, and they’re nowhere to be found in this budget. The funding announced today may fulfill its role as a PR strategy but it doesn’t come close to the kind of

investment that our cities need to stay vibrant and competitive.” — Mark Lee, senior economist, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)

“The announcement of \$250-million over five years for the auto industry is a baby step in the right direction, but much more is needed. This money should be the first part of a much bigger long-term automotive strategy, not a one-time gesture to rally voters.” — Buzz Hargrove, president, Canadian Auto Workers union

“The allocation of \$500-million in 2007-08, dedicated to public transit, is a major boost to future access and mobility in Canadian communities. Extending the Gas Tax Fund as a permanent measure is an excellent response to the ongoing needs for municipal infrastructure investment. This is a good news budget for transit.” — Michael Roschlau, president, Canadian Urban Transit Institute

“The forest product industry is facing the worst economic conditions it has seen in many decades, and the government’s actions in this budget are not enough. In a nutshell, the action taken in the budget by the government is not proportional to what the industry has been doing and what the situation demands.” — Avrim Lazar, president, Forest Products Association of Canada

“The mutual fund industry has long taken the stand that the federal government should help Canadians save for themselves and be less reliant on government programs in the years ahead. The tax-free savings account takes Canadians down that road.” — Joanne De Laurentiis, president, Investment Funds Institute of Canada

“Budget 2008 delivers good news for cities and communities. The decision to make the gas transfer tax permanent represents a critical move toward addressing the municipal fiscal imbalance and building vibrant cities and communities.” — Gordon Steves, president, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

“The government has taken a positive step towards improving access to post-secondary education. By implementing

a national system of grants, the government has responded to a long-standing call by students and their families.” — Amanda Aziz, national chair, Canadian Federation of Students

“There was a real missed opportunity here for the federal and provincial governments to work together on the problems confronting Ontario. There was very little in this budget. It’s pretty thin gruel as I see it.” — Dwight Duncan, Ontario Minister of Finance

Inquiry

1. How did the 2008 federal budget of Finance Minister Jim Flaherty differ from its predecessors? Why do you think this was the case?
2. What were the main new policies contained in the budget? What alternatives did the government not pursue in it?
3. How was the government able to ensure the passing of the budget and avoid defeat in a no-confidence motion in Parliament?
4. For each of the quotes above, indicate: a) the background of the speaker, and what political, business, or economic group he or she speaks for, b) the specific aspects of the budget he or she is reacting to, and c) whether his or her reaction is positive or negative and why.
5. What is your personal view of the measures contained in the federal budget and the economic issues it does not address? Do you think it deals adequately with the main challenges now confronting Canadians and their economy? Why or why not?

Source: CBC News In Depth: Federal Budget 2008, “Highlights,” www.cbc.ca/news/background/budget2008/, “The potatoes are a lot smaller this year, dear,” www.cbc.ca/news/background/budget2008/analysis.htm, and “Quotes,” www.cbc.ca/news/background/budget2008/quotes/html.

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The Chuck Cadman Affair

Did you know . . .
Cadman's wife, Dona plans to run in her husband's old seat as a Conservative candidate.

Further Research
To learn more about the role of the Speaker of the House visit the official Web site at www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/House/Speaker/index_e.html.

Chuck Cadman was a pony-tailed, earring-wearing maverick Independent MP representing a suburban Vancouver riding when he achieved national prominence during a moment of high political drama in May 2005. One year after their election as a minority government, Paul Martin's Liberals were fighting to avoid defeat in the House of Commons. They could count on the votes of Jack Layton's NDP after reaching a compromise over the budget with that party, but the combined forces of the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives just about evened the score. The survival of the Martin government thus came down to the votes of a couple of Independent MPs, one of whom was Cadman.

Chuck Cadman had entered Parliament in 1993 under the banner of the now-defunct Reform Party. He had achieved fame as the leader of a victims' rights movement calling for harsher penalties for young perpetrators of gun crimes after his own son had been shot dead on a Vancouver street in 1996. In 2000, Cadman was re-elected for the Canadian Alliance, the Reform Party's successor, but failed to win renomination in 2004 as a Conservative. Instead, he ran as an Independent and won, largely because of his immense popularity in his riding, and also as a result of widespread disgust over how his Conservative rival had gained the party nomination by flooding the riding association with last-minute memberships.

In May 2005, Cadman was dying of cancer, but he managed to attend the crucial session of the House of Commons where the no-confidence vote in Paul Martin's government would be introduced. He was under intense pressure from both sides to cast his vote in their favour, since it

was clear that this would determine whether the government stood or fell. Days before, former Conservative leadership candidate Belinda Stronach had stunned the country by switching to the Liberals, giving Martin one more much-needed vote. Martin also depended on the support of another maverick, the unpredictable and volatile Independent MP Carolyn Parrish, who had left the Liberals over policy differences. But Martin was still one vote short of what the government needed—a tie vote where the Speaker of the House, Liberal MP Peter Milliken, who does not normally participate in parliamentary debates or voting, would cast his vote in favour of the government.

In the late afternoon of May 19, 2005, as the eyes of his fellow MPs and the nation fell on him, Chuck Cadman rose in the House to cast his vote in favour of the Liberal government. A snap federal election was narrowly averted, much to the chagrin of Conservative leader Stephen Harper, who believed that growing Liberal unpopularity over the unfolding sponsorship scandal in Quebec would have delivered victory at the polls to him. Less than two months later, Chuck Cadman died in his Vancouver home. In January 2006, the Conservatives finally came to power as a minority government after an election campaign in which the sponsorship scandal and allegations of Liberal corruption ensured Martin's defeat.

Tom Zytaruk's new biography of Cadman, *Like a Rock: The Chuck Cadman Story*, unleashed a political bombshell with the potential to cause serious damage to the Harper government when copies of it were leaked to the CBC prior to its publication in March 2008. In it, the author reopens

Quote

In spite of the numerous scandals plaguing Parliament, some observers believe good work is still going on. "This is the wackiest Parliament. It was supposed to be the weakest ever, but it's turned out to be the most stable, and in a way, the most productive."
—unnamed source
(*Toronto Star*, March 5, 2008)

allegations that the Conservatives had sought to buy Cadman's support with the offer of an uncontested Conservative nomination and funding for his campaign. But now there was the even more serious charge that the party had actually proposed a \$1-million life insurance policy to the dying MP, from which his family would benefit after he was gone. In researching his book, Zytaruk had interviewed Stephen Harper, who seemingly confirmed that he had known about the discussions between party officials and Cadman but was unaware of the details involved in any proposed deal. Harper had requested that his comments be kept "off the record," but Zytaruk informed him that they would appear in the book. Dona Cadman, Chuck's widow, believes that Harper knew nothing about any offer of a life insurance policy after he personally denied any knowledge of it to her during the 2006 federal campaign. For his part, Cadman kept the nature of his discussions with Conservative officials a closely guarded secret in the months before his death.

For Stéphane Dion's Liberals, the Cadman affair was political dynamite, which they planned to use to destroy the Harper government. They challenged Harper to come clean over the issue in Parliament and placed news of the affair on the party's Web site, charging that "Harper knew of Conservative bribery." In response, Harper took the unprecedented step of introducing a libel suit against

Dion and the Liberals for defamation of character. The legal status of Harper's suit is unclear, since according to parliamentary rules, MPs have immunity for any statements they make inside the House of Commons. However, this does not apply to remarks made outside the chamber, and a few Liberal MPs, including former cabinet minister and hockey legend Ken Dryden, deliberately repeated their allegations to news reporters assembled on the steps of the House.

In early March, Conservative MP James Moore unequivocally denied that there had ever been any attempt by members of his party to bribe Chuck Cadman in return for his vote. Moore, who represents a Vancouver riding neighbouring Cadman's former seat, was one of the representatives who had met with the dying MP in an effort to win his support just before the crucial vote in Parliament. Should the allegations prove true, however, the results could pose a serious problem for Harper and his party. The Criminal Code calls for penalties of up to 14 years in prison for anyone offering money or other valuable considerations to an MP in return for favours or support. The Liberals called for a full RCMP investigation of the affair, while the NDP proposed that it be referred to a special prosecutor. For now, the Cadman affair remains in a legal and political limbo, with Cadman's daughter Jodi appealing to her mother to think twice about running as a Conservative candidate in the next federal election.

Analysis

1. Why did Chuck Cadman become the focus for a major political crisis in Canada in May 2005?
2. Why was his vote so important at that time?
3. What potentially damaging allegations against the Harper government have emerged from the new biography of Chuck Cadman?
4. Why could these allegations pose a serious problem for the Conservatives should they prove true?

Source: CBC News In Depth: The 39th Parliament – Harper at the Helm, "Timeline: The Chuck Cadman Bribe Controversy" www.cbc.ca/news/background/parliament39/cadman.html

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By-elections and the State of the Parties

While the prospect of a spring election appeared to be fading by early April 2008, the political parties and their leaders continued to prepare themselves for a trip to the polls, probably sometime later in the year. In the meantime, they were sharpening their attacks on their opponents and focusing on the issues and strategies they believed would be most advantageous for them when the election was finally called.

By-elections are called whenever there is a vacancy caused by the death or resignation of a member of Parliament. They can be an important early signal of the state of a government's popularity with the voters. But by-election results are not always a reliable barometer of the mood of the electorate. For one thing, the turnout in by-elections is usually much lower than in general elections, especially when they are called in the winter or, in the case of the most recent by-elections, on St. Patrick's Day! Another aspect of by-elections is that voters in the ridings where they are being held can use the opportunity to cast a vote of no-confidence in the government of the day without risking its defeat.

On March 17, voters in four constituencies across Canada went to the polls to elect their new MPs. The Liberals had previously held all four, three of them by substantial majorities. For this reason the pressure was on Stéphane Dion to prove that his leadership was strong by holding on to all of them. In the two Toronto-area seats, suburban Willowdale and downtown Toronto Centre, two of Dion's former rivals for the party leadership, Martha Hall-Findlay and one-time Ontario premier Bob Rae, were easily elected. This was a "good news/bad news" result for Dion. The arrival of

Hall Findlay and Rae, two prominent and capable Liberals will no doubt add considerable strength and substance to the Liberal opposition in the House. But on the other hand, the presence of Bob Rae, who came in a close third to Dion in the December 2006 leadership race, will increase the pressure on the leader to prove that he is up to the job.

The Liberals lost Desnethe-Mississippi-Churchill River in northern Saskatchewan to Rob Clarke of the Conservatives despite the fact that Dion had hand-picked a star candidate, Joan Beatty, a former cabinet minister in the recently defeated provincial NDP government. In the B.C. riding of Vancouver-Quadra, a traditionally safe Liberal seat once held by former prime minister John Turner, the party's candidate, Joyce Murray, barely held on—with fewer than 500 votes over a strong Conservative challenge.

While both Stephen Harper and Stéphane Dion could take some comfort in what were very mixed results of the by-elections, the news was not as good for NDP leader Jack Layton. Although none of the seats were favourable territory for the party, their candidates lost ground in every one of them, much of it to a resurgent Green Party that cut into both NDP and Liberal support. If these results can be taken as pointing to a trend in the next federal election, then Canadians may be facing another minority government, with increased support for the Greens, a decline for the NDP, and a continuing stalemate between the two major national parties.

Many observers believed that the Conservatives' strategy during the winter and early spring of 2008 was to engineer their own defeat over an issue such as the budget, the extension of Canada's troop

commitment in Afghanistan, or the crime bill, forcing the Liberals to vote against them in Parliament. This was because they were convinced that Stephen Harper was more popular than Stéphane Dion, who appeared to be having difficulty retaining the confidence of his own party members, especially in his home province of Quebec. Polls showed that while no party was likely to gain a majority if an election were to be held at the time, the likelihood was that the Conservatives would hold on to power.

For their part, the Liberals were playing for time, hoping that Dion's image problems would disappear and, more importantly, that they would find an issue with real traction that they could deploy against the Conservatives. They attempted to use the Chuck Cadman affair for this purpose. They also, along with the NDP, seized on the issue of "NAFTA-gate." This was the controversy resulting from a secret meeting between a senior Harper aide, chief of staff Ian Brodie, and highly placed advisors to U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama over the issue of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which Canada and the United States signed in 1988. NAFTA is increasingly unpopular with many Americans, especially those living in industrial states such as Ohio, where Obama and his main rival, Hillary Clinton, were campaigning in a crucial presidential primary election.

According to Brodie's account, Obama's officials assured him that while the candidate would make public statements critical of the trade deal, the Canadian government should take them with a grain of salt as purely for political consumption. In the resulting furor, widely publicized in the U.S. media, Hillary Clinton used "NAFTA-gate" successfully against Obama and won the Ohio primary. For his part, Obama completely denied that either he or his aides had said any such thing.

NDP leader Jack Layton charged that the Harper government had deliberately leaked the story in order to damage Obama's campaign and possibly provide assistance to his Republican rival, John McCain, a politician more in tune with the Conservatives' political ideology.

It is unlikely that either the Cadman affair or NAFTA-gate will be high priorities for Canadians when they do eventually head to the polls, but the state of the economy may be a serious concern. Traditionally, Canada has been one of the first countries to feel the effects of a downturn in the U.S. economy, which by the early months of 2008 appeared to be headed for a serious recession. Job losses, rising energy and food prices, and a serious home mortgage crisis were all warning signs that Canadian political and business leaders could not fail to notice. If the economy does deteriorate markedly later in 2008, it could pose problems for the Harper government since, traditionally, voters take out their frustrations over a poorly performing economy on the government in power at the time.

Another potential problem for the Conservatives is the view of some Canadians that the party harbours right-wing elements with extreme views on social and moral issues. While Harper has sought to present a more enlightened and tolerant image to voters, the remarks of some of his MPs have not always helped him. In early April 2008, a 16-year-old video was released by the Saskatchewan NDP, in which Conservative MP Tom Lukiwski is shown making extremely crude and offensive homophobic comments. Lukiwski was quick to apologize for the remarks, which were also condemned by Conservative House Leader Peter Van Loan. But the Harper government stated that there was no question of expelling Lukiwski from the party caucus, as had occurred previously when another one-

time Conservative MP, Larry Spencer, had called for making homosexuality a criminal offence.

All this happened shortly after the controversy over a proposed new bill that would limit federal arts funding to films that were viewed as containing graphic sex or violence. Charles McVety, an Ottawa lobbyist for the Canadian Family Action Coalition (www.familyaction.org), a right-wing evangelical Christian group, claimed credit for pressuring the government to introduce this bill. Many in the arts community, along with a number of Liberal senators, criticized the proposal as smacking of government censorship and control over freedom of expression.

The Harper government succeeded in gaining parliamentary approval for an extension of Canada's military commitment to Afghanistan over the strong opposition of the Bloc Québécois

and the NDP, who both believe that our troops should be withdrawn as quickly as possible. The Liberals agreed to the extension based on Harper's insistence that any further commitment of Canadian troops to the dangerous Kandahar mission would be contingent on increased support from at least one other NATO partner. At the NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, in early April, Harper was able to gain this support from France. But this does not mean that the issue of Afghanistan is now resolved in the minds of Canadian voters. Many people are still opposed to the mission and fear that more Canadian casualties are likely in the future—adding to the total of over 80 killed so far. The goals of the effort remain unclear in the minds of many, and there is no reason to believe that Afghanistan will fade from the public's attention and not become an issue in the next federal election.

To Consider

1. Why were the results of the four federal by-elections such a mixed bag of good and bad news for the Liberals and Conservatives?
2. Why do you think the Green Party is becoming more popular with Canadian voters?
3. Do you think that either the Cadman affair or NAFTA-gate will provide Stéphane Dion and the federal Liberals with sufficient electoral ammunition to damage Stephen Harper's Conservative government in the next election? Why or why not?
4. How do you think the state of the Canadian and U.S. economies will influence the results of the next federal election when it is finally held?
5. Why do you think the Conservatives continue to have difficulties with some Canadians who suspect them of harbouring right-wing elements with narrow, extreme, and intolerant views of minorities?
6. Do you think Afghanistan is likely to become an important issue in the next federal election? Why or why not?

Sources: CBC News In Depth: The 39th Parliament – Harper at the Helm, "Four Liberal seats up for grabs on Monday," www.cbc.ca/news.background/parliament39/byelections.html, "Harper aide accused of sparking NAFTA-gate," www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/03/05/canada-obama.html, "Tory tape scandal has opposition calling on Sask. MP to resign," Yahoo Canada News, http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/capress/080403/national/sask_scandal_tape&printer+1, "Taxpayers being abused by film funding: lobbyist," www.cbc.ca/arts/film/story/2008/02/29/mcvety-film.html, "NATO to meet Canada's demand for troops in Afghanistan," www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/04/02/nato-afghanistan.html

