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# Liberals offside on infrastructure claims, Tories charge

Bruce Campion-Smith  
Ottawa Bureau Chief

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OTTAWA – In the battle over federal funding for rinks, playgrounds and recreation centres, the Conservatives are accusing the Liberals of not playing fair.

A day after the Liberals charged that Conservative ridings were winning a disproportionate amount of federal funding, the government today shot back with its own rationale for the disparities.

"Conservative-held ridings tend to cover a larger geography than urban opposition-held ridings. As a result, the demands for community recreational infrastructure improvements are expected to be greater among the former," Dimitri Soudas said in an email Thursday.

The \$190-million Recreational Infrastructure Canada (RInC) program has become a political football this week with both Liberals and Conservatives accusing each other of foul ball on the file.

A Liberal analysis of the numbers released Wednesday charged that the Conservatives have short-changed Liberal-dominated Toronto millions of dollars to fund upgrades to recreation centres, playgrounds and rinks.

Toronto 23 ridings — held by 21 Liberal MPs and two NDP MPs — got about 38 per cent



Hockey rinks and other facilities in Conservative seats received about 38 per cent more funding than others in Ontario. In this file photo, minor hockey players are seen playing in a north Toronto arena.

RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

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less than the average Conservative riding in Ontario, prompting renewed accusations that the government was playing favourites as it doled out its massive stimulus fund, Liberal MP Gerard Kennedy said.

The Toronto ridings got an average of \$1.3 million, compared with an average of \$2.1 million approved for Conservative ridings in Ontario — a difference of \$777,787.

The government's own analysis released today did show that Conservative ridings have fared better than opposition ridings.

But Soudas said that opposition-held ridings have gotten funding for a smaller number of more expensive projects, while Conservative-held ridings won funding for a larger number of less-expensive projects.

"Again, this is to be expected from the geographic nature of the ridings," he said.

He said the average federal contribution in Conservative-held ridings is only \$223,652 per project, compared to an average \$291,230 federal contribution, per project, in opposition-held ridings.

And he noted that 28 projects in Conservative-held ridings got the maximum \$1-million federal contribution, compared to 29 projects in opposition-held ridings.

Created in the Conservatives' January budget aimed at fighting the recession, the recreational funding program pledged \$500 million nationwide to construct or repair recreational facilities such as hockey arenas, soccer fields, tennis and basketball courts and pools.

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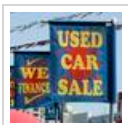
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