

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Rick Mercer

Proroguing is for children (and Stephen Harper)

Even Afghanistan, where Canadians are dying, has a parliament that's open for business

Rick Mercer

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There's a very good reason why the word prorogue doesn't come up that often in our society. Why would it? The word has absolutely no resonance with anyone in Canada because the notion that you can shut down anything for months at a time is a total fantasy. That's the thing about life; it's relentless. If you are an adult and live in the real world, proroguing isn't on the agenda, in much the same way levitating isn't.

God knows I love the idea of proroguing. Everyone in Canada has lain in bed and prayed for the elusive snow day. The idea that while you slept, the heavens opened up and dumped so much snow on the ground that the front door can't open and the school bus just can't come. We all remember snow days and that glorious feeling that the deadlines, the tests, the irritating people, the routine and the responsibilities could be avoided for one entire magnificent day with no consequences whatsoever. And if you didn't do your homework, or you were heading into what you knew was going to be a world of hurt, a snow day meant you dodged the bullet.

But snow days happen to children. If you are an adult, it doesn't matter how much snow falls – you still have to get to work and you still have to shovel the walk. Snow days don't apply to adults unless you happen to be the Prime Minister of Canada, who with one phone call has the ability to give every member of Parliament two months off.

We elect these men and women to travel to Ottawa and represent us in the House of Commons. Well, forget that notion – it's old-fashioned and democratic. Welcome to Canada 2010 – we embark on a brand-new decade as a country that has taxation without representation.

It is ironic that while Parliament has been suspended, we remain a nation at war. On New Year's Eve, we greeted the news that five Canadians were killed in a single day with sadness but not surprise. We are at war because, ostensibly, we are helping bring democracy to Afghanistan. How the mission is progressing is open for debate but this much is certain – at present, there is a parliament in Afghanistan that it is very much open for business. Canada has no such institution.

In Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai's government faces fierce opposition at every turn. Many of his cabinet choices have been rejected in a secret ballot by the more than 200 parliamentarians who sit in the legislature. Simply closing it down and operating without their consent is not an option; to do so would be blatantly undemocratic or at the very least downright Canadian. If Mr. Karzai suspended the legislature on a whim, we might be forced to ask the question why Canadians are dying to bring democracy to that country.

Stephen Harper doesn't have that problem. Our Parliament has been suspended for no other reason than the Prime Minister simply can't be bothered with the relentless checks and balances that democracy affords us. He doesn't want to have to stand in the House of Commons and hear anyone question him on any subject. I don't blame him. Parliament is filled

with jackals, opportunists and boors. The problem is, like it or not, they were elected.

I also don't blame the Prime Minister for wanting to keep his ministers out of the spotlight. This is a man who could argue that he is Canada's greenest PM simply because he's the only one who has gone out of his way to give potted plants key portfolios.

The problem is, he is the one who appointed cabinet and like it or not, they are supposed to be accountable. A minister's job is not to hide in his or her riding; it is to be accountable in Ottawa – or at least that was the promise.

This Prime Minister has gone from the promise of an open, accessible and accountable government to a government that is simply closed.

It is too bad that prorogation isn't something that our soldiers had in their arsenal. When faced with the order to head out on a foot patrol in the Panjwai district of southern Afghanistan, to risk their lives to bring democracy to that place, wouldn't it be nice if they could simply prorogue and roll over and go back to sleep? Soldiers don't get that luxury. That is afforded only to the people who ultimately order them to walk down those dangerous dusty roads in the first place.

The Rick Mercer Report *airs Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. on CBC.*

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