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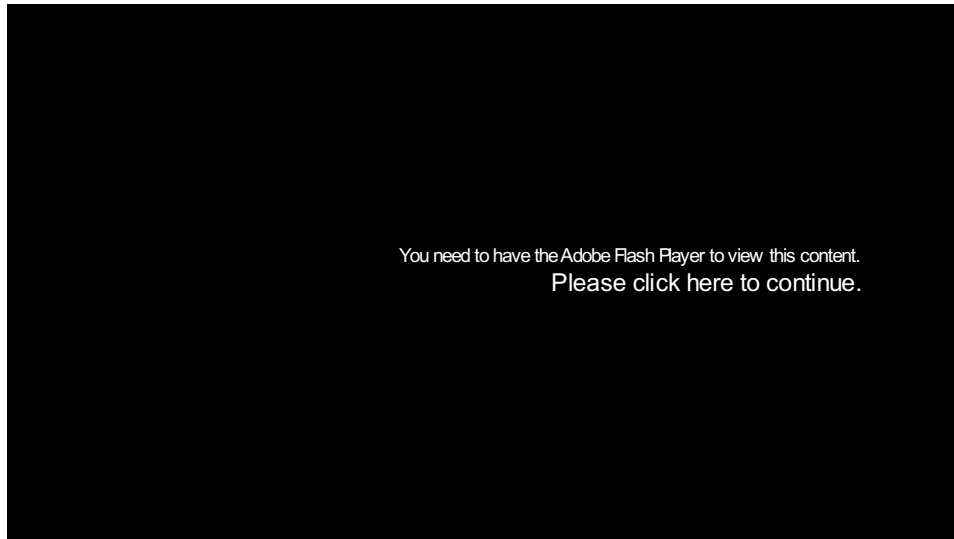
## Scandals hamper Harper's plans (with video)

### Conservatives have a rough ride ahead sorting out numerous recent catastrophes and dousing political fires

BY MICHAEL DEN TANDT, POSTMEDIA NEWS | MAY 30, 2013 2:46 PM

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Stephen Harper says while the facts in the Sen. Mike Duffy scandal are not good, they are clear. The prime minister says he didn't know of his former chief of staff's payment to the senator until the media reported it.

In Ottawa, the opposition parties are suddenly in a jam, unlike any they've encountered in seven-plus years of Harper government. With so many Conservative scandals on the front burner at one time, and a limited number of allotted questions in the House of Commons, how to deal with them all? It's a logistical nightmare.

At best there's a risk of scandal chaff setting in - targeting-system confusion, caused by excessive shrapnel in the air. At worst there's scandal overload, followed by scandal burnout, followed by a massive scandal hangover. It's not like it was in the Mulroney years, when the government parcelled out its catastrophes at a leisurely pace, on average one a year. That was so 20th Century. In 2013 everything happens at full throttle - especially, it seems, when the wheels come off what was previously a well-oiled, ruthlessly efficient machine.

Set aside for a moment the Senate expense scandal, concerning the still-unfathomable \$90,000 payment to former Conservative Senator Mike Duffy from former PMO Chief of Staff Nigel Wright. Never mind the simple weirdness of the fact that Wright had to be run down, on the hoof as it were, by an intrepid and apparently fit CTV reporter, Daniele Hamann, and her cameraman, Jimmy MacDonald, during a 4 a.m.

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nananujian, and her cameraman, Jimmy MacDonald, during a 4 a.m. jog, before he, Wright, would take his first questions about the affair. Let's take a glance at the rest of the pack.

First of course is robocalls, a pattern of gerrymandering first unearthed by my Postmedia colleagues Glen McGregor and Stephen Maher in February of last year. Last Thursday Federal Court judge Richard Mosley ruled that in the May 2, 2011 election, electoral fraud occurred in ridings nationwide, albeit not to a degree great enough to change outcomes. While he did not point fingers at any individual or party, the judge found the perpetrator or perpetrators had access to the Conservative Party's CIMS database. The fraud was high-tech and widespread. Elections Canada continues to investigate.

Next is the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and its patronage-tainted hiring of Kevin MacAdam, a former staffer of Defence Minister Peter MacKay. Monday the Halifax Chronicle-Herald reported that a Public Service Commission draft report on the 2010 hiring was edited to delete a paragraph suggesting political interference. The edit was done at the behest of MacKay's office, according to the account by the Chronicle-Herald's Paul McLeod.

Moving from patronage back to alleged fraud, one-time Stephen Harper appointee Arthur Porter is back in the news. Porter, whom the Harper government named chairman of the Security Intelligence Review Committee in 2010 and who resigned in 2011 following a National Post investigation into his dealings, was arrested in Panama this week and charged with fraud. As head of the SIRC, Porter had access to state secrets. Extradition proceedings are underway, the Post's Brian Hutchinson reports. Cue the Graham Greene references.

The backdrop, alongside the Duffy mess of course, has been the excruciatingly public meltdown in Toronto of the Ford brothers' political dynasty - staunchly Conservative and pro-Harper.

"People want subways and we will have subways when Stephen Harper is the prime minister," enthused Mayor Rob Ford to the CBC in 2011. "And that's the bottom line." The bottom line now is that the PM's best friend in Canada's largest metropolis is fighting for his political life and, based on the breakneck pace of resignations from his office, losing.

Breathless? Don't be. There's more. If we broaden our search beyond alleged skulduggery, to bungling and incompetence, it's a cornucopia. Here the opposition runs into difficulty, grappling as it must with relatively humdrum files such as the case of convicted spy Jeffrey Del-isle. According to reporting by The Canadian Press, CSIS was aware of Delisle's illicit activities for months before his arrest, but neglected to inform the RCMP. The Mounties first heard it from the FBI. Opposition leader Tom Mulcair pressed Public Safety Minister Vic Toews on this bit of outrageousness in the Commons Monday but, amid the din over Duff, it barely registered.

Before much of this hit the news, Harper was already struggling to douse the most serious internal brush fire of his tenure, sparked by his refusal to allow social conservatives in his caucus to reignite debate over abortion. That hasn't gone away. It has been eclipsed, however, by the deadly-serious peril in which the Conservative party finds itself over Senate spending, the Duffy payment, and allegations that a Conservative-controlled Senate committee soft-pedalled a report on Duffy at the behest of the PMO - a charge Harper vehemently denies.

Looming in the middle distance are rumours U.S. approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, linchpin of the government's resource strategy and once thought to be a slam dunk, is anything but. Few informed observers would rule it out. But few would rule it in, either.

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Rejection would be a disaster, politically for Harper and economically for Canada.

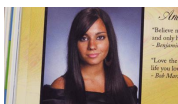
All told, it has been a hellish two weeks for the government. It's difficult to imagine a cabinet shuffle, however deep and broad, that can change this many channels.

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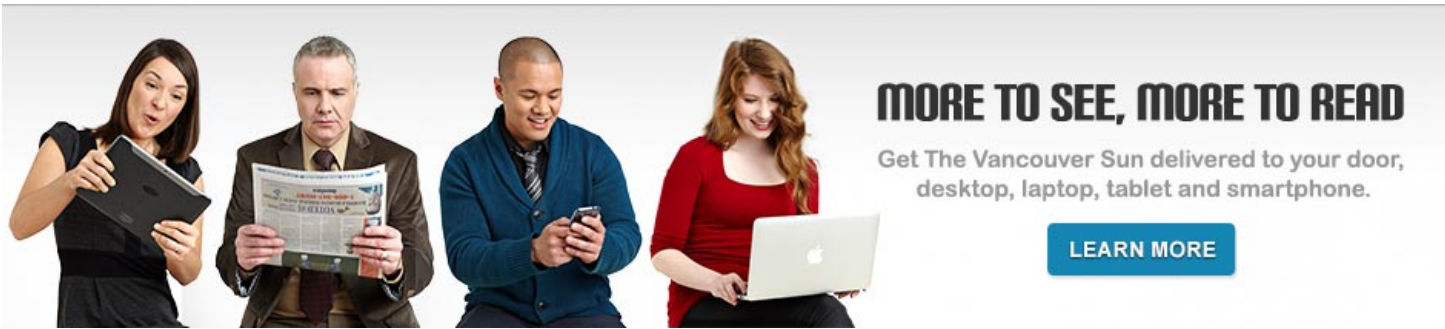
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