

SOUND AND FURY SIGNIFYING ... SOMETHING?

As a follow-up to our last Commentary – [Confidence Matters!](#) – on the state of play in Canada's Parliament, we at TACTIX seem determined to keep poor Shakespeare spinning in his grave: Budget 2011 is but a walking shadow that will strut and fret its hour upon the parliamentary stage and then be heard from, no more.

Focused on core electoral messages of "stability" and "staying the course in fragile economic times", the Budget promoted the Conservative Government's record as fiscal managers, setting out a plan to deliver a budgetary surplus by fiscal 2015-16. It also continued the government's practice of budgetary "narrowcasting" by including measures aimed specifically at core components of the Conservative electoral base – seniors, working families, and small businesses.

However, with no big shiny object to support and no poison pill to prevent the Opposition parties from voting their conscience, Budget 2011 was more or less dead on arrival. Within moments of Finance Minister Jim Flaherty rising in his place in the Commons, the parade of Opposition leaders to the microphones began. First, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff made it plain that Her Majesty's Official Opposition had not been persuaded by the government's offering. This was no surprise. The Liberals had learned their lessons from past Conservative budgets which they had been cornered into supporting by the other two Opposition parties.

Next, Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe assured the gathered throng of reporters that the absence of his key budgetary "ask" – billions of dollars to Quebec as compensation for its early transition to a harmonized sales tax – meant he could not support Budget 2011. Then the waiting game began. Were there enough measures sprinkled in the budget to please the NDP? The answer came faster than many expected. NDP leader Jack Layton, who had appeared as the most wobbly of the so-called opposition coalition members, emerged to read a prepared statement indicating the NDP could not support the budget as presented. He signaled that his door was open for negotiations with the government. Finance Minister Flaherty quickly slammed that door shut. And so now the stage is set for one of the showdowns [TACTIX described in our last commentary](#). The question in Ottawa has changed from last week's "will there be an election this spring", to "is there any way to avoid an election?"

In TACTIX' view, the answer is simple. No.

A SPRING FLING WITH THE ELECTORATE

As described in *Confidence Matters!*, there were three possible opportunities for the Opposition parties to defeat the Government in the coming days. While the House of Commons Procedure and House Affairs Committee has been meeting diligently, has tabled one report finding the Government in contempt of Parliament and is working on a possible second such report, it seems increasingly unlikely that the House will actually debate either motion.

Likewise, the odds of the House reaching a critical vote on the Budget have slipped from slim to virtually none. The Bloc sub-amendment on the Budget, to be tabled today (along with the Liberal's amendment) and voted on tomorrow, would not normally be a confidence matter. The Liberal amendment would be voted on during the third day of budget debate. But as our updated calendar below demonstrates, that vote would not happen until next week.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
21 • Tabled of PROC Report 1 (table and order printing)	22 • Budget delivered (Gov)	23 • PROC Report 1 eligible for Debate • First day of Budget Debate	24 • Vote on Bloc Budget sub-amendment?	25 • Supply Day (Liberals) • Vote on Supps 'C' • Tabling of PROC Report 2 (CIDA Minister)
28	29	30	31	1
ELECTION				

The scenarios for a spring election have narrowed considerably. Although surprises can emerge in Ottawa and last minute deals can be struck, as of today we believe it is most likely that the three Opposition parties will collectively defeat the Government on a specifically-worded motion of Confidence on the Liberal Supply Day scheduled for Friday, March 25th.

While it is worth noting that no Government having been defeated on a motion of confidence has won the ensuing election campaign (save for Trudeau in 1974), the Harper government comes out of the gate with a strong lead in all of the recent public opinion polls. Moreover, assuming the Prime Minister waits until Friday for the non-confidence vote and goes to the Governor General over the weekend to seek dissolution of the 40th Parliament, the Conservatives get the advantage of a week of Government of Canada advertising to promote Budget 2011 before the election campaign starts. They can also unleash another round of attack ads before election spending limits take hold.

An election is now a virtual certainty.



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Navigating the Public Sector



Election Watch 2011

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THE TACTIX CAMPAIGN PULSE

As soon as the opening shots of Campaign 2011 are fired, TACTIX will be launching a suite of new services. Centred on a new Campaign Pulse 2011 website and a daily e-mail summary of campaign events, media coverage, polling, leaders' tours and our own commentary on the campaign, TACTIX will bring you the news most likely to affect your business.

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