



The new lobbyist registry could be a game-changer.

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This time it's for real. Canadians are going to the polls this fall.

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There is no policy on politically charged signs in Hill office windows.

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Tories point to committees, lack of confidence as justification for fall vote

Conservatives say fixed elections law applies to other parties, too.

By **ABBAS RANA**

The Harper Conservatives say there are three principal reasons that they decided to seriously contemplate triggering a fall election: that the Liberals say they don't have confidence in the government but have refused to defeat them; that waiting longer only gives the Tories more negative press from

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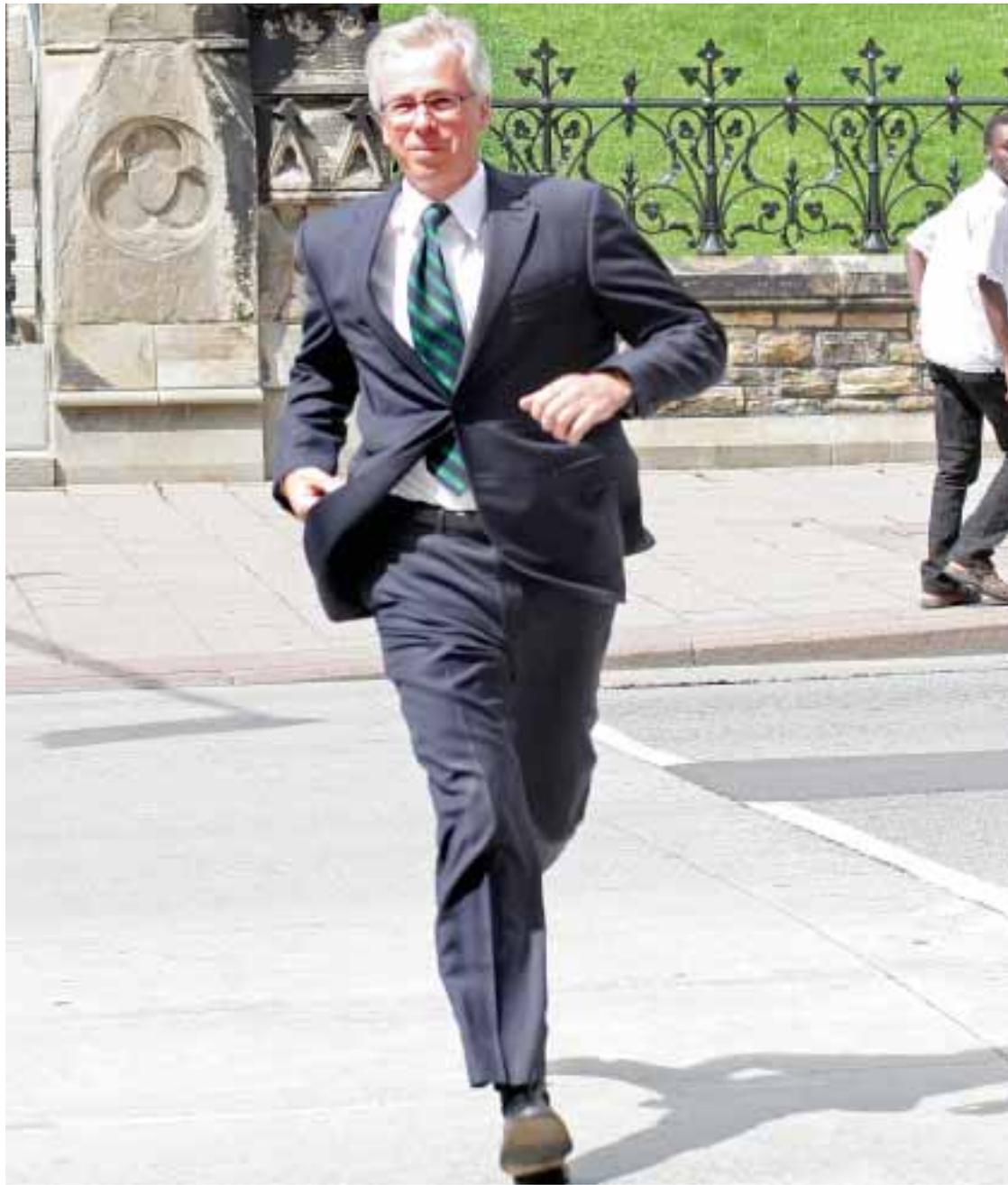
No one takes Ethics Committee summons seriously: Poilievre

Committee chair Paul Szabo says committee 'investigation service' may be used to summon witnesses personally.

By **CYNTHIA MÜNSTER**

The opposition parties have barred their own party officials from testifying at House Ethics Committee proceedings, and "no one takes their summons seriously," says Pierre Poilievre, the Parliamentary secretary to the president of the Treasury Board.

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Photograph by Jake Wright, *The Hill Times*

Somebody's got some election spring in their step: Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion ran to a news conference at the National Press Theatre last week, and responded to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's fall election taunts. 'It's not my job to go into an election because the Prime Minister asked me to go into an election. My job is to replace him, and timing is important,' he said. Them's fightin' words! PM Harper had suggested he may have to call a fall election if Parliament's not productive.

Saint Lambert byelection to be a tight race, federalist vote divided

All the parties are hoping that a strong showing in the byelection will be a bellwether for the other 450-area ridings.

By **HARRIS MACLEOD**

MONTREAL—Summer may be winding down, but in the sleepy Bloc Québécois-held riding of Saint Lambert, Que., the byelection campaign is heating

up. Provincial Liberals from Quebec MNA Nicole Ménard's camp are helping with both the Conservative and Liberal candidates' campaigns, and the national parties are pulling out all the stops to boost their chances in the South Shore Montreal riding.

"I know that there are people from the provincial Liberal association that are helping me, in fact one of the main organizers from Mme. Ménard's office is here working very hard for us, as are

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Opposition says Afghanistan mission to get nasty under U.S. leadership

The Sunday Times reported that the U.S. is planning an 'Iraq-style troop surge' after Americans take over the mission in January.

By **HARRIS MACLEOD**

Opposition critics say that a U.S. plan to consolidate troops in Afghanistan, deploy thousands of more soldiers in an "Iraq-style troop surge," and push for unified command in the South of the country, will be politically risky

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Joint Support Ship program has floundered in a 'minefield'

The program has drifted under the radar as a successful program. But it now appears to have hit rough waters.

By **DARCY KNOLL**

It was the strongest plank in the Conservatives' book of big announcements. Kicked off by the Liberals in 2004 and reaffirmed by the Tories in 2006, the Joint Support Ship program carried a bipartisan lustre in rebuilding the navy. However, despite the optimism, it appears the project has floundered in the minefield of Canadian defence procurement.

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NEWS

Joint Support Ship program not reflecting so well on the Canada First defence strategy

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Launched in 1963, 1968 and 1969, the navy's auxiliary oil replenishment (AOR) ships have long been entrusted with supporting Canada's naval task groups. This fleet consists of HMCS Preserver and HMCS Protecteur. The third and oldest ship, HMCS Provider, was decommissioned in 1998 at 35 years of age.

In 2004 then Liberal defence minister David Pratt said, "These vessels are now 35 years old and have become difficult and costly to maintain. And frankly, they were designed to meet the needs of a Cold War navy. There's no question they've performed extremely well, but it's time they were replaced." As such, the Joint Support Ship project was launched at a cost of \$2.9-billion—a base of \$2.1-billion, plus an estimated \$800-million for 20 years of servicing.

Seen by some as "all-singing, all-dancing" supply ships, these new hulls are to be designed for a number of tasks. Beyond supporting other ships with fuel and supplies, they are to contain medical and dental facilities, allow the operation of three to four helicopters, and carry equipment and cargo for forces deployed ashore.

As this was to be a new type of ship, the military held a competition to design the blueprints for this vessel. Eventually, the group of four suitors was whittled down to two, with consortiums led by ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems AG and SNC-Lavalin Profac Inc., each receiving a \$12.5-million contract for the project definition.

According to the military's schedule, these designs were to be submitted to the government by 2008, with the winner being announced later this year. If all goes well, the first ship will be delivered in 2012 with the project completed four years later.

Amidst the clamour surrounding the purchase of C-17 strategic airplanes, replacing the Hercules

aircraft and finding helicopters for Afghanistan, the Joint Support Ship drifted along under the radar as one of the government's more successful programs.

But it appears the project has hit some rough waters. According to industry insiders, both design teams were unable to come up with a ship design under-budget. Although details are tight, officials say one team submitted a blueprint for two vessels, while the other sent in a plan for three, which was way over budget. In other words, industry has sent a strong signal to Ottawa—either increase the funding or scale down the project.

With Canada's current supply ships reaching the end of their lifespan, navy advocates say the government will need to act quickly to solve the logjam.

"It's really up to the government to decide if they're going to have to go back to the drawing board, which obviously we don't want, because there are major time constraints on this project, so we need to get it done right away," said Jerrod Riley, the national deputy director of the Navy League of Canada. "Our current supply ships—the AORs—are well past their reasonable service life. I don't know how much longer they'll be able to keep them in service. Obviously, when you get a ship that's that old, the maintenance costs go through the roof.... We need to make sure we get the first ship delivered by 2012 if we're going to continue to deploy our navy globally and independently."

The idea behind the purchase of three ships is to allow the navy to station a vessel on both coasts, while leaving the third ship able to act as a replacement if one is in repair. Military advocates say that by only purchasing two ships, naval forces would be left vulnerable if one ship needed maintenance. According to Ontario Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chair of the Senate National Defence Committee, three ships may not even be enough.

"There should have been four in the initial planning, not three," he said. "If you have three vessels you won't always have one available on each coast. The minimum number of any type of ship—if you want to have one available on each coast on a continuous basis—is four. Any naval officer you talk to will tell you that."

With the recent stalling of the Joint Support Ship program the industry gossip mill has begun circulating fears that the military may look abroad for new ships. Sources say that last month retired rear-admiral Ian Mack, the director general for major project delivery (land and sea) at DND, travelled to the Netherlands to visit Dutch shipyards where they are building their own version of a JSS.

Industry sources associated with the Joint Support Ship program who asked to remain anonymous said they are worried Canada may look to scuttle the project and buy these supply ships off-the-shelf from Europe.

Peter Cairns, president of the Shipbuilding Association of Canada, stated he was aware of the retired admiral's trip to Europe, but he said he wasn't sure of its purpose. However, he said that if Canadian shipbuilders hypothetically lost the Joint Support Ship contract it would have a devastating effect on the industry.

"I would suspect it would probably push the shipbuilding industry out of business actually," Cairns said. "That's a pretty stark statement, but in fact it would have an extremely negative effect on the shipbuilding industry and it would be in fact contrary to everything the government said up to now. They have reaffirmed that the building of their government ships will be done in Canada—until they change their tune I think going offshore is quite a long shot...because that's not the government policy."

Indeed, according to a 2006 DND press release, "In accordance with Canadian shipbuild-



Photograph by Jake Wright, The Hill Times

So...where are them ships? Defence Minister Peter MacKay, shown above in a file photo, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced a 20-year defence strategy last spring. However critics said it was short on substance.

ing policy, the Joint Support Ships will be built in Canada. This infusion of opportunity into Canada's shipbuilding industry means the creation of high quality jobs and fostering of industrial development, which will in turn contribute to a stronger Canadian economy."

Nevertheless, industry officials remain concerned. Military officials contacted about the visit by Mack certainly were not eager to clarify the matter. More than a week (and several phone calls) after the question was asked, the department's public affairs branch responded with a short e-mail.

"In the business of procuring complex military equipment, it is common practice to meet with allies to compare processes and lessons learned and to discuss similar experiences," said spokeswoman Krista Hannivan. "Although the director general major project delivery (land and sea) was in Europe on other business, he had a chance to meet with government representatives from the Netherlands who are undertaking a similar project, and they compared best practices in the context of an update to progress on their project."

Officials with the Public Works Department also had very little to say, the common response being that "because the evaluation process is not complete, we cannot comment further."

When asked if the department will meet its schedule for the Joint Support Ship, Public Works

spokeswoman Lucie Brosseau said, "I don't have that information at this time."

In the end, this ultimately appears to be the problem facing those involved with the program. Every day Canadian sailors are watching their supply ships grow older, while industry is seeing the schedule for the Joint Support Ship getting tighter. At the same time, a government that was once eager to cut taxes is now seeing a faltering economy and a limited spending pool.

Last spring, Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, Alta.) and Defence Minister Peter MacKay (Central Nova, N.S.) stood up in front of the troops in Halifax and said they had a bold, 20-year strategy for the military. However, after the plan was released, critics panned the document for being long on rhetoric and short on details.

For sailors serving on 40-year-old supply ships and business officials trying to tweak their proposals, charting a clear path forward on the Joint Support Ships could send a strong message that the Conservatives have taken control of defence procurement. Otherwise, the JSS could prove to be a glaring example of a Canada First Defence Strategy heading in the wrong direction.

Darcy Knoll is a senior writer for Esprit de Corps Canadian military magazine. The above article will appear in the magazine in September.

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