

## Grit leader Ignatieff can't have it both ways, says one Hill Times reader

Let's see if I understand this: Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff believes Prime Minister Stephen Harper's budget doesn't do enough to help the unemployed, misses the chance to encourage "green" technologies, breaks Conservative promises to provide stable equalization payments, attaches strings to infrastructure funding, and doesn't contain a credible plan on emerging from a deficit. Mr. Ignatieff doesn't trust the government's financial numbers and he doesn't believe the Conservatives will actually implement the budget's proposals. And yet he voted to support it?

Where Mr. Ignatieff could have defeated the Conservatives and taken the reins of government to provide an alternative plan and model of leadership—with the commitment of coalition partners for a stable period of circa two-and-a-half years—he elected not to. Nor did he move substantive amendments to the budget. Instead, he put the government on "probation" delivering sporadic report cards. Extra-parliamentary means exist to obtain such information and there are always ample opportunities to introduce motions of confidence without meaningless "progress reports" from a government on a "short leash."

This in the face of a budget that economist Hugh MacKenzie of the Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives, argues fails on three key evaluative criteria; namely the size of the stimulus package, where it will be spent, and how it will position Canada's economy when the world emerges from recession. MacKenzie makes clear that by fudging the size of the stimulus package as \$29-billion (whereas \$10-billion of that amount is projected to come from cash-strapped municipal and provincial governments) Canada's stimulus commitment equals only 1.3 per cent of GDP, barely two-thirds of the 2.0 per cent recommended by the IMF, and far less than is being spent by many other nations.

The consequence will be that when the recession ends, Canada will find itself lagging behind countries that have made adequate and wisely-targeted investments in their infrastructure and economies. Furthermore, while poorly-focused broad-based tax cuts are considered by most economists to be minimally useful as a stimulus, and entrench structural deficits by reducing revenues for government, some \$3.5-billion of the stimulus package consists of broad-based tax cuts.

Those who argue that to defeat the budget and bring down the government would delay the implementation of "shovel-ready" stimulus measures, appear to have fallen victim to the fallacy that if you are heading in the wrong direction, you can compensate by rushing to get there.

Political pundits also argue that Mr. Ignatieff is buying time for the Liberals, waiting for the Conservatives to "wear" the recession (which many economists predict will get much worse in 2009). However, what of the Canadian people? Should they have to "wear" the recession for the sake of a political stratagem? Has the concept been lost of a political leadership ready to serve its citizens, even when the going gets tough?

Not, evidently, south of the border, where Barack Obama has assumed the presidency at a time of almost unprecedented economic difficulty, hitting the ground running with a suite of strategically-targeted and visionary economic and social measures. In Canada such notions of leadership seem not to have penetrated political thinking.

**Christopher Majka**

**Halifax, N.S.**

*(The author is a member of the NDP.)*