

February 25, 2010

Honourable Peter Milliken, MP
Speaker of the House of Commons
222-N, Centre Block
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I write to you today to inform you of my request to hold an emergency debate on recent advice given by the Prime Minister to Her Excellency, the Governor General, requesting that the second session of the 40th parliament be prorogued. I do not make this request out of any question of the role of Her Excellency, but rather because I believe the judgement of the Prime Minister in offering such advice was deeply flawed.

As I am sure you are aware, this is the second recent prorogation requested by the Prime Minister—the first being in December, 2008 in a direct attempt to avoid a vote of non-confidence which was then scheduled for debate and decision. The current prorogation seems to stem from another attempt by the Prime Minister to avoid accountability on matters that are inconvenient to the government.

Our system is one where the government exists because the Governor General decides it has the support of the House of Commons. It is therefore a fundamental character of our democracy that when a government is appointed, it is to be held directly accountable to the House of Commons. I submit to you that the recent advice of the Prime Minister to the Governor General to prorogue the second session proves we have a Prime Minister who believes the House of Commons should exist at the convenience of his government, and not the other way around. This is a fundamental breach of the Prime Minister's duty to be accountable to the elected representatives of the Canadian people, and as such constitutes an urgent situation.

I ask for this as an emergency debate because the government has indicated it will be requesting other avenues for special debates be unavailable to parliamentarians in the regular course of this session's business. The government's current plans are to proceed directly from the opening day of the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, where only two government members traditionally speak, to a Budget the next day. I fear that once again they wish to have no opposition speakers in the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, as they did in the second session of this Parliament. The government has recently declined to allow for any take note debates to happen, so I make this request to you under Standing Order Fifty Two because other options to raise this urgent matter are limited.

As a former House Leader for my Party, Stanley Knowles, is quoted as saying in the second edition of House of Commons Procedure and Practice on page 677, "*Debate is not a sin, a mistake, an error or something to be put up with in parliament, debate is the essence of parliament.*" I make this request in that spirit.

Sincerely,

Jack Layton, MP
Leader, New Democratic Party of Canada

cc: Libby Davies
NDP House Leader