

Interview with Stephen Harper

- 1) **Mansbridge:** Let me start with what was announced today, the new security measures at airports. It seems to me that the question becomes 'what does this say about – nine years after the war on terror began – that increased security at airports is needed to prevent another threat? What does that say about the times we live in right now?
- 2) **Harper:** I'm not sure when you sit back it really says anything that surprising. I don't think any of us thought these threats would go away. And the threats seem to be mutating somewhat. And authorities....that we have to keep adapting. It's my hope that as we adapt, we find smart and relatively efficient ways to adapt. But that's what we're going to have to keep doing. Obviously, the incident around X-Mas brought in a whole new series of dimensions that governments are going to have to adjust to.
- 3) **Mansbridge:** It's interesting, that X-mas threat, because the Americans basically admitted that was their problem, their mistake in this person getting through their screening process, and yet, it's effecting everyone. We're basically having to change our rules because of a mistake being made.
- 4) **Harper:** Well, I guess what I would say is that we face common threats. I wouldn't want to say that what happened there could not happen here. And obviously, if they're going to take those kind of steps to address those kinds of threats in the future, we're going to look at those threats and examine whether we will take similar measures. We don't have to take identical measures. But we certainly have to take measures that would prevent any similar kind of threat in Canada. The first priority... I know this causes inconveniences for everybody... ultimately (it) has to be the safety and security of the Canadian air traveler and of our airport facilities. And we know, unfortunately, these kinds of things are at risk in this day and age.
- 5) **Peter:** The scanner issue is one that was studied for eighteen months. The privacy commissioner ruled on it. But there have been other things happening over these past couple of weeks. And I wonder how you figure on that balance between security and the rights of an individual. We've seen a list of countries being named, and questions about racial profiling. Does any of this worry you?
- 6) **Harper:** Well, these are all things that factor into our considerations. We have privacy laws in Canada. We have court decisions. Our courts have tended to be less deferential to governments on security matters than the United States. This is something that has to factor into security measures it undertakes. And obviously these are issues of treating people fairly... and balancing privacy concerns with the ultimate goal that we must protect and make sure the travelling public....
- 7) **Peter:** do you think any rules (?) are being crossed....
- 8) **Harper:** We haven't done a thorough examination of what measures the U.S. has undertaken and how we're going to apply them to Canada. We're going to look at those one at a time. We may arrive at some different judgments. We may not. But those things will be factored into our decision-making.
- 9) **Peter:** When you see a list of countries, some of which we have normal relations with, does that bother you?
- 10) **Harper:** I go back. I don't think it's about diplomatic relations. We had the same thing with the Visa problem. It's not about diplomatic relations. These are often about other considerations. It ultimately, in this case, has to be about the possibility of a security threat and dealing with that. As we say, we're going to take a look at these measures very carefully and we may arrive at different conclusions. The one concern I do have about all of this, and I've expressed this to

American leaders. I see the gun registry approach to a lot of security issues, which is let's just put everybody on a list, register everybody, everything. And we know from our own experience with our gun registry that this is not necessarily the smartest and most effective way to actually identify real threats. And it's my hope that as we look at these things, which invariably will cause some changes in mass procedure, that we make sure that we respond in ways that are intelligent, that effectively identify threats before they happen. As opposed to simply massive bureaucratic sets of rules or procedures, which I think in and of themselves are of limited value.

- 11) **Peter:** (Did you) suggest that to president Obama?
- 12) **Harper:** I can't remember. I know I certainly had that conversation with President Bush. I can't recall whether I had it with President Obama, but I've had it with a series of American officials.
- 13) **Peter:** Let's move on to the other issue that's come up in the last week, and that's the decision to prorogue Parliament. You know that it's received a lot of attention. A lot of discussion. When you made the call to the Governor General last week, and she gave you the approval for that, what did you say to her as the main argument for suspending Parliament?
- 14) **Harper:** Well, first of all as you know, the decision to prorogue when the government has the confidence of the house is a routine, constitutional matter. The truth of the matter, *Peter, is that sessions of Parliament since confederation have been on average, roughly a year.* **(First mention)** Look, the reason is quite simple. The government has, I think notwithstanding, a very difficult economy, I think we've had a reasonably successful year in Parliament, but it has been an extraordinary year, in which we were trying to implement an extraordinary economic action plan, a series of stimulus measures, to deal with the peculiar circumstances of 2009. We're now looking at a very different year coming forward. We're much more optimistic... And we want to take some time to recalibrate the government's agenda, both on the economy and other matters. So we're going to present Parliament with a series of proposals for legislation going forward when the House reconvenes.
- 15) **Peter:** But you've seen the reaction, and I'm not just talking about the partisan reaction. There have been editorials, commentaries by respected constitutional experts who say this is the kind of thing that is leading to **cynicism** of the Canadian people about the political process. That the process is there for parties and politicians, but not for the people. That a session of Parliament can be suspended at a time when there are all kinds of things on the books, some of which... are extremely important to your government. And they're off the books now.
- 16) **Harper:** Well, let's be clear. First of all the government passed all of its important financial and economic legislation in the past session. So we did conclude all of that. We have, as you know some important crime legislation. That legislation will continue to be difficult...in the Senate. As you know we have some opportunities to fill vacancies in the Senate and help deal with that problem. *But as I say, Peter, there's nothing particularly unusual about a session in Parliament being roughly a year in length.* **(Second mention)** Governments... examine their agenda from time to time and refresh it. And I would invite the opposition parties to take the opportunities to advance their own ideas. The government is going to look comprehensively at its agenda with a new throne speech and I would be delighted to hear any suggestions of a general or specific nature that they have.
- 17) **Peter:** But what do you say to those, outside the political process, who look at what's happened year....second time in a year, different circumstances in different cases. But the argument being made by many, you know you can't pick up a story on this issue without someone referring to the **Afghan** detainee issue and that's really the reason that you and your **gang** wanted to stop the investigative work of the committee.
- 18) **Harper:** I think the polls have been pretty clear, Peter, that that's not on the top of the radar of most Canadians.

- 19) **Peter:** No, but that's....
- 20) **Harper:** What's on the radar is the economy. As I say... the first thing when we're going to do when we come back is have the second stage of our economic action plan, a budget, new financial measures. That's our focus. We're in a very different kind of economic year. That's what we're adjusting...the opposition...they've been on that subject for three years now and I'm sure they'll continue at it.
- 21) **Peter:** Is not legitimate to wonder...just because it's not on the radar of most Canadians... that that means it's not important.
- 22) **Harper:** Well, obviously we have a big difference of opinion with the opposition about whether that is an issue that warrants attention or not. But as I say, the decision to have a new session of Parliament after a year is not unusual. Last year the circumstances were unusual. Everybody concedes that. This year, circumstances are quite normal. *As Prime Minister, I think my sessions of Parliament have been a year or slightly over a year. (Third mention)* So this is fairly standard procedure and I don't think it makes sense for a session of Parliament to go on and on without the government re-examining its overall agenda.
- 23) **Peter:** Do you think the decision to prorogue should be left in the hands of the government of the day? Or should it be a decision that Parliament should have a vote on?
- 24) **Harper:** No, I think it should ultimately be in the hands of the government of the day. It's ultimately about the government presenting its agenda...and the government calibrating its own agenda. When Parliament prorogues, private member's legislation is not broken off. It continues. So the opposition's work will continue as soon as we come back.