On June 17, Parliament met briefly to consider $87 Billion in new spending. The government allocated just four hours for the Opposition to review, examine, question and debate this spending. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that was remarkably inadequate.

Parliament has been suspended since mid-March, with just a few short sessions, and will remain suspended until September 21.

**This is no way to run a country. At a time of unprecedented spending and a global health crisis, Parliament should be meeting MORE OFTEN to review the government's plans, examine how to make aid programs better, and hold government accountable for its spending and program design.**

Instead, the Liberals hide from parliamentary accountability, with the active cooperation of the NDP. Our country is run by executive order, announced by daily press conferences outside the Prime Minister's home.

Opposition MPs have been working hard to identify needed improvements to COVID-19 programs, and to help our constituents navigate the sometimes bizarre criteria. Despite this government's belief that they alone have all the answers, Conservatives can take credit for several changes to aid programs that have made them more useful to our constituents.

We were elected to hold the government to account, to help government make better decisions, and to respond to questions and concerns from our constituents. This government evidently does not wish to be held to account. That the government refuses to respect the role of Parliament is a sad day for democracy in Canada.
The Liberal Spending Plan: a Four-Hour Mini-Series

On June 16, Parliamentary Budget Officer Yves Giroux said that the spending estimates tabled by the Government, for parliamentary review on June 17, do not provide a complete picture of how much will ultimately be spent on COVID-19-related aid. The estimates are for $87 Billion, but real calculations suggest over $150 Billion.

To explain, Giroux noted that a number of measures promised by the government are not included in the estimates because they did not come out of the "consolidated revenue fund".

Specifically, he noted that the estimates don't include cost details regarding the $45 Billion CEWS (wage subsidy program) and the loan program to small and medium-sized businesses.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer also warned that it will be hard to get a clear picture of the estimates from government officials because Members of Parliament were only given four hours to debate them.

Some of the questions raised by the Conservatives included:

- $7.7 million “to support regional presence, stabilize and enhance PCO capacity and the transfer of exempt staff in Ministers' Regional Offices” (that sounds a lot like spending money to put political staff into government regional offices);
- $60 billion for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (there are many questions about how the extension of CERB will be managed and what it will cost);
- The nearly doubling of the Strategic Innovation Fund to $538 million (how and who is it being spent on, and who is deciding?);
- $155 million for the Canada Summer Jobs program, a program which usually costs about $263 million (has it been cut back, and if so, why?)

Conservatives are also seeking fixes to existing programs. For example:

- Since CERB is to be extended, it needs more flexibility to help people return to work gradually. Currently, if someone makes $1000 in a month, they get the full CERB. If they make $1001, they get nothing. The math may make it attractive to stay home, and it makes it harder for businesses to bring employees back gradually. There needs to be a sliding scale.
The government announced changes to **CEBA** ($40,000 interest free loan) which would allow businesses who do not use traditional employment structures (contractors, dividends) to be eligible. However, more than 5 weeks have passed and the government has not actually modified the program. There are huge gaps between announcements and implementation that make it hard for people to access the advertised program.

Conservatives are in support of a proposal by the Office of the **Auditor General** to fund audits on COVID-19 related programming, since Parliament has been curtailed. A Conservative motion at the Finance Committee passed unanimously, so there is hope it may happen.

Provide liquidity to the oil and gas sector through monetization of tax losses; and service companies through the factoring of receivables. The responses to this key sector of the Canadian economy have been grossly inadequate and too slow to materialize. This display of disdain is unacceptable.

These are the kinds of questions that Opposition MPs are elected to ask. Unlike the media, we examine estimates line by line and look for things that need explanation. With only four hours to examine $87 billion in spending, it is clear the government has no interest in answering questions.

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**Holiday "Snapshot" of Canada's Fiscal Position**

This government has even refused - under pressure from both the Conservatives and the Bloc Quebecois - to present an economic update despite the obvious turmoil in Canada's budget.

The government claimed they didn't have enough information to present such an update. The Prime Minister said, "providing a fiscal update would require a crystal ball". It is a startling - even shocking - admission that the government doesn't think they have even the broadest idea of the nation's finances.

Finally, on June 17, the Prime Minister announced that they would present a "snapshot" of Canada's COVID response on July 8, although not an economic update. The Parliamentary Budget Officer sighed that a "snapshot" is something at least, better than the silence that previously greeted this request.

A snapshot is short of what is needed, but it is credit to the relentless Official Opposition that Canadians will even get that.
The Government's Secret Green Shift Deal

On June 1 I rose in Parliament at a meeting of the COVID-19 sub-committee. My questions were about the overlapping spending on several committees, organizations, and agencies, all charged with the same task.

The questions I asked were:

1. According to La Presse, federal cabinet ministers Steven Guilbeault, Catherine McKenna and Jonathan Wilkinson have been handed responsibility for crafting an economic recovery plan that aims to accelerate "The Green Shift". True to form, this cabal around the Prime Minister has declared, “Let's not let a good crisis go to waste”. Can the Prime Minister confirm that his ministers have been working with environmental lobby groups for further financial support to engineer Canada's economy, post COVID?

2. The "Task Force for a Resilient Recovery" quoted last week they would have recommendations for government action available within eight weeks, notably eight weeks when Parliament is, by this government's design, absent. Can the Prime Minister disclose to this committee how many meetings his 61 environmental activists/advisors have had with the task force or its members?

3. The "Task Force" is a who's who of academics and bureaucrats, surprisingly no one from the productive part of the Canadian economy. So much for pan-Canadian input. The task force is reviewing work produced by Smart Prosperity, a government-funded institute whose membership overlaps with both the "Task Force" and the Government's own "Canadian Institute for Climate Choices". This is a bureaucratic environmental Ponzi scheme, with overlapping personnel and overlapping mandates. The only thing not overlapping is their funding. How many organizations does this government need to fund to recycle work produced by other redundant government-fund entities?

4. A notable member of the "Task Force" in question is one Gerald Butts. Perhaps just a coincidence, but can the Prime Minister confirm this is the same Gerald Butts who was forced to resign as his Principal Secretary for his role in attempting to force Canada's then Justice Minister into breaking the law?

5. Is this the same Gerald Butts who was paid $360,000 U.S. by an American funded organization after he started working with this Prime Minister?

6. Is this the same Gerald Butts whose role as the Principal Secretary in the office of Ontario's then Premier advanced policies that now saddle Ontarians with the highest energy costs in North America? Is this the same Gerald Butts who weighed down Ontario with the world's highest subnational debt burden, all for the benefit of new green jobs that notably have never arrived?
You can see the clip by clicking on this link: June 1 Questions on Green Shift

It is worth watching if only to see the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity, clearly over her head with a portfolio irrelevant to my questions, read the same pre-printed answer to each of my questions in both official languages. Not one of the "answers" was relevant to the question I had asked. What you can’t see in the clip is that two of the Ministers I referenced in my questions were actually in the House, but deferred to this Minister to read out the non-answers. This Government's disrespect for Parliament knows no bounds.

Help with COVID-19 Aid Programs

Although the economy is reopening slowly, many people and businesses still need help to stay afloat. The government's programs often lack detail, or worse, have so much detail that nobody can figure out if they qualify. My office is here to help. I also have a self-serve website with quite comprehensive information, updated every day. It includes news from the Province of Alberta and City of Calgary, particularly with respect to businesses and services that are slowly being permitted to re-open.

gregmcleanmp.ca/covid19

Where is the Money Coming From?

On June 2, I appeared on a video podcast hosted by my colleague, MP Jamie Schmale. Jamie wanted me to answer the question of where the COVID-19 money (estimated now at over $150 Billion) was coming from, and how it will impact Canada's finances. You can watch the podcast (I am in the second half; MP Michael Chong is the guest in the first half). My interview starts at about the 18 minute mark.

Watch the podcast by clicking here: Blueprint with Jamie Schmale June 2
Please get in touch if there's anything my office can do for you.

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