

Releasing Government Bad News Under Cover of a Hockey Game

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Thursday, June 02, 2011

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Based on the bad news coming from the BC and Canadian governments under cover of game one of the Stanley Cup finals, we should be wary of the Canucks going to seven games.

It used to be Friday afternoons were a great time for governments to release bad news. The week's media cycle was drifting off into a weekend and there would be less room for public analysis than if bad news was released at 9am on a Monday. This is why I am always scouring news websites after 3pm on Fridays. Just in case.

But yesterday, game one of the Stanley Cup finals was a perfect day for bad news because the city, province and much of the country was fixated on the hockey game. Here's what contemptuous filth emerged while we were anticipating the game...in case you missed it:

1. A few days ago, [the BC Liberal government changed the date and time of budget estimates debate for the premier's office](#) to coincide with the hockey game. Budget estimates debates are when the opposition can examine the contents of each line item of the provincial budget. In a contemptuous, cynical obstruction of democracy, transparency and accountability, the premier decided that debate about her office budget would take place when virtually no one would be interested in watching on [Hansard TV](#) and virtually all of the media would be distracted.
2. On a related note, BC Liberal cabinet minister Moira Stilwell [[whose Twitter introduction](#) to her leadership debate was a moderate failure] tweeted on Monday how much she was distressed at the legislature sitting past dinnertime this week. I'm sure she was being at least somewhat facetious, since they might have to miss the hockey game:

[The house is sitting till 9pm this week; couldn't we just talk faster? #BCPOLI](#)

Since it was her government that chose to keep the legislature closed for around 600 of the last 700 days, her hypocrisy is galling. But then, if she's being facetious, that's ok, right? No. That makes it even worse because of how little regard her government holds for democratic accountability.

But then she followed up that gem with this one last night:

[The house sits tonight during the game-ridiculous!! Go #Canucks!](#)

Honestly? I'll tell you what is ridiculous: her premier rescheduling her office's estimates debate to occur during the game. And I agree that evening sittings aren't terribly valuable, but they are necessary when the government's goal is to minimize the number of legislative sitting days, thereby minimizing the

number of question periods they must endure, and maximizing the opportunities to vote closure on debate so they can ram through legislation with their majority of votes. This is why I'd particularly enjoyed the recent years of minority governments in Ottawa and why we'll be bothered by lots of majority closure motions in the House of Commons in Harper's majority.

3. CBC BC's legislative reporter, Stephen Smart, [also reported yesterday](#) that the BC Liberals' public sector wage austerity program of net zero wage increases will continue for two more years. We'll see about that. Again, not the kind of news to release on a Monday morning.

4. Laila Yuile [discovered yet another announcement](#) buried in Stanley Cup hype that affects the safety of citizens using court services: the firing of a few dozen more sheriffs leading to the closure of even more courtrooms. This, all during a time when millions of our tax dollars are funding stick men/mimes on TV commercials to explain to us what the government wants us to know about their beloved HST.

5. Shifting to Ottawa, we found out today Foreign Minister Baird [announced before yesterday's hockey game](#) that parliament will be using their majority to ram through a 90-day [or more] extension to the Canadian Forces' military involvement in Libya, which is set to expire in 14 days.

All I can say is that I hope the Canucks win the Stanley Cup in four games to minimize the likelihood of more bad news announcements buried on game days.

Political announcements are starting to remind me of a Rolling Stones song:

One hundred thousand disparus
Lost in the jails in South America
CURL up baby
CURL up tight
CURL up baby
Keep it all out of sight
Undercover
Keep it all out of sight
Undercover of the night [or, Canucks game]