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TORONTO NEWS

Economy, Afghan detainee policy on agenda for start of new Parliament session

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By: John Stall

Toronto - The Harper Conservatives will be on the hotseat as a new session of Parliament begins, Monday.

The mission in Afghanistan and concerns about the slowing economy will be expected to dominate the session.

It will shape up to be the toughest Parliamentary session for Harper so far. Opposition leaders will be expected to press the government for changing the detainee policy in Afghanistan without informing Canadians through Parliament.

On the economic side, Liberals said this is not the time for an election, but with a recession looming they are demanding the Harper government to put a budget in place that helps those most affected by an economic downturn.

Pollster Nik Nanos agreed that things have changed since the fall economic statement and the risk is higher for the Harper government.

"They've got problems with Chalk River and how they are going to manage that, they've got the Schreiber inquiry...a downturn in the economy and what's going to happen in Afghanistan; it all adds up to political risk for all the parties," Nanos said.

"The risk for the Liberals is the fact that it's not good enough just to take down the other guy. They actually have to put down or set forth some kind of program that can show Canadians what they would do," he added.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion said he's not looking for an election before the federal budget and will keep the government alive if the budget addresses economic concerns.

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