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**Bob**



  
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Let's talk about the future.

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## Remarks for Launch of Liberal Leadership Campaign, Toronto, April 24 2006

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Good Evening.

My name is Bob Rae and I'd like to talk to you about the future.

The future of the Liberal Party of Canada. And the future of our country.

First, I want to say though, how delighted I am that my mother Lois is here today, and I am proud to pay tribute to her and my late father Saul.

What I know about public service I learned from them.

And I am equally proud that my wife Arlene Perly Rae and two of my daughters Judith and Eleanor are here as well, because this new path is not for me alone. With them and all my family and friends, I am proud to embark on this journey.

I am today declaring my candidacy for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

And I want to devote myself to this task with all the energy and skill I can muster.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier said that his essential beliefs could be expressed in a few words: Love is stronger than hate, and faith is stronger than doubt.

Laurier reminds us that Canada is at its best when it includes everyone, when it is generous, when it believes strongly in itself.

Politics and public service matter.

What governments do or don't do can make a big difference in people's lives, for better or for worse. I care deeply about what happens to Canadians, and what happens to Canada, and I know that I can do more about that by being part of the political process.

I've spent the past thirty years deeply involved in politics and public service, from federal politics to the Premier's office in Ontario, to working in the private sector. I have worked on some of the most complex problems that Canada – and the world – face.

I am running as a Liberal for the leadership of the Liberal Party because I believe that Canada needs a party that embraces change, that is open to all Canadians, that understands politics is about serving people, not a rigid adherence to theories or ideologies.

The Liberal Party of Canada understands that politics works best when we are committed to a middle way, to solving problems, seizing opportunities, and facing up to the future with zest and optimism, not gloom, doubt, or suspicion.

I have been attracted to the Liberal Party because it IS optimistic, because it builds on hope, not fear, because it believes in opportunity for everyone, because it is inclusive, tolerant, and committed to equity.

The Liberal Party of Canada welcomes individual initiative. And supports collective commitments, like Medicare and the rest of our social safety net. That's what this Party has done so much to build.

The Liberal vision is generous, and balanced.

In the Liberal Party, the glass is always half full -- and this is what has drawn me in. Like this party, I love this country and all its people.

Let me say I have been made to feel very welcome by members of the Liberal Party of Canada. It is an open Party. And I have already been working hard to reach out to all sectors of the Party.

This leadership convention will provide the Liberal Party with a critical opportunity for renewal. I look forward to working with all the other leadership candidates and Liberals from every part of this country, long-time Liberals, as well as new recruits, in seizing this opportunity to rebuild the progressive centre in Canadian politics.

This is no small challenge. It begins with three simple words: respect, purpose and commitment. Respect for each other, and for the fellow citizens we seek to serve. Purpose in all that we set out to accomplish. And commitment to working together to reach our goal.

My route to today has not been direct, but it has been honestly and sincerely taken at each step of the way.

I was a Liberal as a young man, then joined the NDP in the mid '70's. I worked hard for the NDP for 20 years. I have great friends in that party, and warm memories of what we did, and tried to do, together.

But a decade ago there was definitely a parting of the ways. On my part, there is no recrimination.

As the conservative movement around the world becomes more ideological and more deeply entrenched, I have become convinced that a progressive centre has to talk to Canadians about values, choices and priorities in a way that is practical, candid and free of ideological rhetoric.

We are an alternative that avoids polarizing approaches, or marginalizing certain groups, or failing to respect the rights of minorities.

The Liberal Party, for me, best expresses the progressive, principled, pragmatic, spirit that Canadians want to see in their government. We are a Party dedicated to finding solutions, finding common ground and, more often than not, finding that precious middle ground.

The Liberal party is right to be proud of its distinguished history in building this great country, and has to continue to face the future with the courage shown in the past. A courage that has embraced great nation-building projects.

I see a Party that welcomes diversity, is ready to take on global competition, ready to win. And ready to help make a better world. A party that when it governs, governs on behalf of all of Canada's people and when it does not, provides vigorous and impassioned opposition.

The unity and strength of the country is at the heart of my concerns as a Canadian and my commitment to public service.

The Federal government needs to be a strong, collaborative, and flexible partner within our federation. Deeply committed to problem-solving on behalf of all citizens. With an open, principled spirit, that is pragmatic, respectful of jurisdiction, and of regional and cultural differences.

Liberals must always oppose those who seek the separation of a province, OR the fatal weakening in capacity of our national government. It is a mistake to think that there is some simple, one-time "fix" to our challenges. A wise federalism ensures that the federal government always retains its capacity to lead.

As a member of the House of Commons from 1978 to 1982 I supported official bilingualism, the transformation of our federal institutions, and the patriation of the Constitution and the creation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As Leader in the Opposition in Ontario, I argued strongly in favour of the Meech Lake Accord. As Premier of Ontario I helped negotiate the Charlottetown Accord.

I have always been a friend to Quebec and Quebeckers. And I think that that is well understood. Respect, openness, transparency, and the search for honest solutions that work for Quebec and work for Canada have always guided me in the past, and will continue to guide me in the future.

To me, the soul of Quebec is generous, socially progressive, tolerant, outward-looking, and innovative. This dynamic attitude is at the heart of Canada's vibrancy and sophistication as a nation.

I am confident that Quebeckers want to move on past the sterile debates, and past the “chill” on open discussion that still exists too much. I believe that they want to move on, and focus on the real issues and the real needs and opportunities of people and communities. Respected in their differences and their aspirations.

And I believe in my bones that Quebeckers will always say Yes! to Quebec and Yes! to Canada.

The Liberal party must build back in Quebec and demonstrate that we are the party best able to capture and express that spirit. We will build back and renew. And I intend personally to be a big part of that effort.

But anyone who aspires to lead our country has to recognize that the needs of all provinces and regions must be listened to and respected. The unity of Canada is about all parts of the country. It is about the North, British Columbia, the Prairies and the Atlantic Provinces. That is our Canada, from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

I continue to believe that the search for economic growth, shared opportunity, and environmental sustainability need to happen together. It is an attainable vision.

As Premier, the first lesson I learned is what I call the Billie Holliday lesson. "I've been rich and poor and rich is better". Prosperity and the encouragement of prosperity are critical. Not simply desirable: they are vital to improving the lot of our citizens today and those who will join us here in the future.

I governed during the worst recession since the thirties. The prosperity of the late eighties came to a dramatic halt. Many businessmen have told me that in good times mistakes can be quickly overcome. In tough times that is just not the case.

Canada has had a remarkably good run for over a decade. Liberal Governments lead by Jean Chretien and Paul Martin have built a strong foundation through a combination of deficit elimination, job creation, and wise investments. Investments in research, innovation and modern infrastructure. Investments in social programs as well, such as maternity leave, health care, and stabilizing the Canada Pension Plan.

But we have much more to do to ensure that the success continues. A prosperous, healthy future will not be achieved through neglect or tepid measures, or limited government.

The pace of change around the world is remarkably fast — economies that were relatively undeveloped and unconnected to us have now assumed a powerful role in

all our lives. China, India, Brazil, Russia — a few years ago what happened to these countries was a matter of political interest, but not a direct economic concern.

That is certainly not true today. The production of goods and services has truly become global. This is not a factor of ideology. It is reality. A reality driven by new technologies, new methods, and more open trading systems.

To survive, Canada's fiscal discipline of the recent past must continue. The allergy to deficits we have developed is a healthy one. Furthermore, our tax environment and regulatory regimes have to respond to the challenges of a global marketplace.

But it is an illusion to think that wealth creation and a powerful economy are simply about a single tax cut or reform of regulations. Canadian governments have to lead, by doing much more.

Prosperity is for a purpose. Wealth creation must be a partner to shared opportunity.

Governments must invest much more aggressively in our people, in their education and training. In our universities. In research of all kinds. We must invest in modern infrastructure, and help companies and people cope with the inevitable impact of change. So that Canadians stay ahead of the curve in the global economy, and are not sideswiped by it.

Regional development, connectivity, fostering entrepreneurship. These are all aspects of a strong economy in this globalized world. So is a comprehensive child care plan, with an emphasis on early learning, which will help more families participate more fully in our economy. Children living in poverty are a challenge to our conscience and to our future. That is why a foundation of prosperity matters.

Our natural resources continue to give us a competitive advantage. But the economy of the 21st century will be about skills and education. Our future will depend on our ability to create and innovate, in sciences, technology, the arts, and skilled trades. So young people can contribute to their communities, have great careers, build businesses, and good lives for themselves and their families.

Why am I so passionate about this? Well, let's look at the reality.

Across the country a quarter of our kids are leaving high school without a diploma. Among many Canadians — the aboriginal community for example — the number is even higher. A further quarter, get their high school diploma and don't go on. This is simply not acceptable in a country as prosperous and generous as ours.

In the new economy, 70 per cent of the jobs being created require more than a diploma.

Canada needs to be a country that values excellence in learning as much as it does a quality health care system. We start from a strong base. But our universities are not well funded by international standards, and we are at risk of embracing mediocrity.

That is not good enough for our Canada.

We simply must unite around this mission of learning, education, and training as a great, pan-Canadian mission. Working in partnership with provinces, and business. To ensure access, and excellence.

A Strong Economy, and Investments in Learning are urgent matters. They will be the top policy priorities of my campaign. And the top priorities of a Liberal government I would seek to lead.

In advancing the interests of Canadians we have to remember that Canada is part of a multilateral trading world. We can't stop the world and try to get off. Indeed, more open trade is a big part of the prosperity we have enjoyed over the last decade.

We are extraordinarily dependent on access to other markets for our success — far more so than our neighbour to the south, and far more than most of our trading partners. So lowering trade barriers, establishing dispute settlement procedures and respecting the rule of law when it comes to trade is in our national interest.

But we also have to recognize that other governments often preach free trade but practice something else. And when that happens we have to respond aggressively in defense of Canadian interests and Canadian communities.

I have worked on the softwood file for the past several years as a lawyer, and know full well the extent to which the U.S. industry and political system have worked against the interests of our producers.

In agriculture, Canadian exporters are faced with two big protectionist systems, the U.S. and Europe. We can't abandon our farmers in the face of these barriers and subsidies in economies that are so much larger than our own.

Canada should be at the forefront of those calling for free, fair and open trade. But we should be prepared for some difficult fights.

Helping those industries and producers who are hurting will cost all of us but, in the end, it will cost us less than sacrificing people on the altar of an ideology that is preached by many but practiced by few.

In a dynamic and open society, governments need to embrace the idea that their purpose is to lead and help make things happen; not to create large bureaucracies to run things directly. The progressive idea is to use public policy to ensure outcomes that improve the lives of most people.

The market is not to be despised, as the far left would have it. Neither at home nor globally. Experience has taught us it is simply the best mechanism to increase wealth and to encourage innovation and change.

But neither is the market to be worshipped, or held up as the solution to all of our challenges. To do so would diminish our lives as citizens, volunteers, caregivers, community members and the full variety of ways in which we express ourselves as human beings. And would diminish the important role a focused, effective government plays in helping create a prosperous, tolerant, equitable society.

The purpose of Canada's government must be more and better opportunity; better lives for citizens; timely, high quality health care; clean air; clean water; good homes; schools; excellent universities and colleges; parks; roads; and subways. A steady reduction in poverty.

We can do this. Working together.

These elements are what help make vibrant communities, and Canada in turn a vibrant, successful country.

We need to build on solemn commitments such as Kyoto and Kelowna, where Canadian governments agreed to address climate change, and the aspirations of Aboriginal citizens.

Some will say that a person who led a government that ran deficits in the early 1990s, should not aspire to lead. Let me say this: I made mistakes when I was premier of Ontario. I have learned from them and am the wiser for them.

We also accomplished many things, of which I am very proud. And from which I also learned.

I have learned that nothing is as bad as your detractors say it is, nor as good as some promoters would have you believe.

The important thing when you have setbacks is to pick yourself up again, and get reengaged. Wiser and even more committed than before.

As I took out my Liberal Membership, I was provided with a definition of the word "Grit": "tenacity, pursuing something over the longer term, learning from mistakes, staying on course, being focused and determined." If that captures the reality, then I would say that I am very comfortable being a Grit.

I am proud of my years of public service, proud to have been an active participant in the Canadian political arena for the past 30 years.

In recent years, in a private capacity, I have learned a lot from mediating disputes from the commercial world to Burnt Church in New Brunswick. I have learned the need to listen, to show respect, to accommodate, and to persuade.

The softwood lumber dispute has convinced me of the need to defend Canada's interest, and the communities that depend on such industries. And the need for the Canadian government to lead.

My work abroad in Sri Lanka and Iraq has taught me that recognizing the dignity of people who think, speak and pray differently is at the heart of creating just and tolerant societies. I have a renewed sense of appreciation for our Canadian commitment to tolerance, civility, and the rule of law. Which must never be taken for granted.

I am convinced that these values must guide our own approach to foreign policy. And I want to say here that. Jean Chretien was right about Canada and Iraq - not because he was following public opinion, but because he thought the invasion ill advised and contrary to international law.

My work with the families of the victims of the Air India bombing has made me realize that Canada's experience of terrorism has been real and that too little attention has been paid to the meaning and significance of this experience in the affected communities.

And made me realize that as welcoming as we have been, we still have more work to do in being inclusive towards all our citizens. For we have many immigrants and Aboriginal citizens who are unemployed or underemployed.

My work on postsecondary education in Ontario has reinforced my sense that Canada's future has everything to do with how much we are able to invest in the education and training of our people.

Above all I have learned that governing is about choosing. We have to have a focused set of priorities. They need to be few in number. But be the right ones.

I have had extraordinary opportunities to serve over the years. Every project has introduced me to more Canadians, taught me more about what is meaningful to us, and shown me more about who we are as a people.

Canadians are very fortunate. We are privileged to enjoy a standard of living, an effective democracy, an equitable, tolerant society. I do not agree with the view that Canada is broke and needs fixing. That is it is mediocre.

I do believe that we have to build on our great strengths, aim higher. To ensure that all Canadians, whatever the colour of their skin, language, home province, their religion, sexual orientation, age, can feel comfortable, respected, and confident that they can live full lives, and be part of one of the best nations on the planet.

Canada is known throughout the world for its peaceful ways, its good government, and its strong and generous social safety net.

We are known as honest brokers, as fair and ethical participants on the world stage.

But we can be even better. We must do better because Canadians want us to.

My campaign will be about affirming this pride, this hope, this ambition.  
To my fellow Liberals I say: the cup is 1/2 full. Let's make the cup runneth over!

Leadership is about vision. Persuasive ability. Commitment. Relevant experience.

But no one has ever led a great party alone.

I need all of you. I need every Liberal who is excited about rebuilding this great party.

I need every Liberal and every Canadian who is excited about helping this country achieve its brilliant potential to get involved.

I need every Canadian who wants to make a difference to join this great party.

If you believe in what this party can achieve, if you believe in a great and glorious future for Canada, join me.

Thank you.

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