

Canada, Quebec, and Progressive Federalism

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Check Against Delivery

Good Evening.

Let me say first how wonderful it is to see so many proud, and happy Liberals gathered here. In the heart of Montreal!!

I am really pleased to note the presence of my good friend Jacques Saada, the President of my Quebec campaign, who is doing a great job in helping us rebuild in Quebec. Martin Cauchon is also here today, a gutsy guy who was a great Minister of Justice. I deeply appreciate their support and encouragement.

How proud I am to be here with you as we embark on the great task of renewing and rebuilding this great Party here in Quebec! I was in Quebec City yesterday meeting with Liberals and was impressed with their pride in the upcoming 400th Anniversary celebrations. It underscores the importance of building and rebuilding.

We are coming together here in a certain spirit. One of pride. Respect for each other. Determination to rebuild. And determination to govern again.

There is work to be done. To rebuild trust. To reestablish a vision. And to capture the dynamic energy that resides in the hearts of Quebeckers.

I'd like to talk to you about the future.

The future of a progressive and prosperous Quebec. The future of the Liberal Party. And the future of a strong united Canada.

I care deeply about what happens to Quebeckers, and what happens to Canada. For unity 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 am convinced that a progressive centre is needed to talk to Canadians about values, choices and priorities in a way that is candid and focused on the future.

The Liberal Party, for me, best expresses the pragmatic spirit that Canadians want to see in their government. We are a Party that finds solutions.

The Liberal party is right to be proud of its history in Quebec, and in building this great country. We have to continue to face the future with the courage shown in the past.

The Federal government needs to be a strong and flexible partner within our federation. Deeply committed to problem-solving on behalf of all citizens. With an open, progressive spirit.

Quebeckers are giving Mr. Harper's Conservatives a good look. It is clear that Quebeckers want to choose federalism, and that is why.

I ask Quebeckers to also take a good look at what Liberals stand for. Yes, some mistakes were made. We have learned from them and are now looking at the future.

But it was not a mistake to eliminate the deficit. It was not a mistake to achieve the best economic growth in the whole G-8. It was not a mistake to reduce child poverty. Or double parental leave. Or introduce gun control legislation. It was not a mistake to ratify Kyoto. Or say no to the war in Iraq.

The Liberal Party remains the real choice for progressive federalism in Quebec.

Federalists do have a choice: they can choose a Party that believes government can be a force for good. A Party that is fiscally responsible and socially progressive. A Party that invests in learning and the environment. A Party that cares about the least fortunate in society. A Party that shows leadership and independence on the international stage.

Or they can choose a socially conservative party that believes always in reducing the role of government, and in building firewalls between jurisdictions. That will do anything to achieve that goal. A Party that is ready to break agreements on the environment, on the rights of aboriginal people, on children.

Which Party should Quebeckers choose?

To me, the soul of Quebec is generous, tolerant, outward-looking, and innovative. Quebeckers have a "can-do" attitude in cultural and artistic achievements, in business, in science and research and in sports.

We Liberals must demonstrate the vision and the will to help realize these aspirations, while dealing with the real problems.

Where the federal government approaches Quebec as a partner in joint projects, respectful of jurisdiction and tradition, language and culture. Ready to leave behind stale, paralyzing debates.

I have always been a friend to Quebec and Quebecers. And I think that that is well understood. Respect, openness, transparency, and the search for honest solutions have always guided me in the past, and will continue to guide me in the future. Progressive federalism means a focus on what is efficient and practical, that avoids ideological enthusiasm. We respect differences, but we also understand the need for cooperation.

The Liberal party must demonstrate that we are the party best able to capture and express that spirit. And I intend to be a committed fighter in this battle.

Let's think about Quebec's challenges. Last year a number of thoughtful Quebecers from different political backgrounds, including Lucien Bouchard, published "Un Manifeste pour un Quebec Lucide."

Many important observations were made in this document. About challenges such as an aging society, debt burdens, the ability to sustain social programs, the need to invest in learning and productivity. The need to shift the debate in Quebec.

The real issues Quebecers face are identified there. Not more referendums, as the Bloc advocates. But the real needs of the people.

Liberals are prepared to address these hopes.

The encouragement of prosperity is critical. It is vital to improving the lot of our citizens today and those who will join us here in the future.

As Premier of Ontario, the first lesson I learned is what I call the Billie Holliday lesson. "I've been rich and poor and rich is better".

Canada has had a very good run for over a decade. Liberal Governments lead by Jean Chretien and Paul Martin built a strong foundation through deficit elimination, job creation, and wise investments.

But we have much more to do to ensure that the success continues. A prosperous, healthy future will not be achieved through neglect, or by shrinking the fiscal capacity of our government,.

The pace of change around the world is remarkably fast. Powerful new economies have emerged on the scene China, India, Brazil, and Russia.

The production of goods and services has truly become global. This is the 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. Furthermore, our tax environment and regulatory regimes have to respond to the challenges of a global marketplace.

But our Governments must also invest much more aggressively in our people, in their education, training and ideas. 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.

The Federal government has to join with the provinces to make this a priority. There are focused steps that the Federal government must take to complement Provincial and Territorial responsibilities and efforts in learning. I shall be discussing these steps during the campaign.

Let me say something about the link of a prosperous economy to a sustainable environment: we simply cannot have one without the other. Fighting climate change with real measures, ensuring clean water supplies, clean air, and the preservation of biodiversity – these things take coordinated effort across all sectors of society.

And coordinated efforts across nations, such as through the Kyoto Accord. It is not an option for governments to bail out, to simply throw up our hands and say “it is too hard.” Like the Conservatives have just done.

Quebeckers should bear clearly in mind what the Conservatives have just done in their recent Budget. They are scrapping initiatives to help citizens conserve, to encourage industry to meet targets, to help scientists understand the impact of Climate Change on Canada's North, to invest in new technologies, or help other governments switch to cleaner energy, or help developing nations invest in clean alternatives.

This week the Conservative Minister of the Environment Chairs an important international meeting in Germany, while implying that we are about to back out of Kyoto. Canada signs an international agreement and then disavows it. This is embarrassing. How do Liberals differ from Conservatives? Compare this week's events with how proud Stephan Dion made us in Montreal last December when he brought the world together in a spirit of renewed commitment on Kyoto.

Businesses that invest in energy efficiency, in new technologies, in cleaner practices are more efficient, productive and profitable in the long run.

A Liberal government would make the environment a key priority and ensure that the right incentives and partnerships are in place to make Canada an environmental leader, not a laggard. We would invest in new technologies, such as clean coal, wind energy, hydrogen fuel, and carbon sequestration, support the development of an East-West power grid to ensure energy security.

We have succeeded before on large environmental challenges. Acid rain. The ozone layer. We need the same practical spirit on climate change and sustainability.

Sustainable wealth creation must be a partner to shared opportunity.

So must a comprehensive child care plan, with an emphasis on early learning, which will help more families participate more fully in our economy.

Ken Dryden is to be saluted for his efforts in that area. A Liberal government would ensure his plan gets implemented. The Conservatives want to scrap it.

They also want to scrap the gun control program. I say “shame”. Though there have been problems, that does not mean we throw out an initiative that has made a real difference to our sense of security in our communities. Police chiefs want gun control. The families of those who have died want gun control. So do I.

I hope that the Liberals, together with the Bloc and the NDP would join together in this minority Parliament to ensure that this does not happen.

Children living in poverty are a challenge to our conscience and to our future. That is why a foundation of prosperity and wise social investments matters. A Liberal government would renew its efforts to eradicate child poverty.

A Strong Economy, Sustainable Environment, Investments in Learning, a secure peaceful society. These are the proper approaches to the real issues facing Quebec and Canada. In choosing Liberals again, this is what Quebeckers will be choosing.

Let us consider foreign policy for a moment.

Liberals have always stood for an independent foreign policy. We do not automatically say “ready, aye, ready,” to anyone. We support principled, multi-lateral approaches to development, and international peace and security.

Jean Chretien was right to say No to joining the war in Iraq. I supported that decision then, and I support it now. Because the case for going just didn't add up. Liberals have consistently opposed unilateral interventions.

Make no mistake; Steven Harper would have taken us into the Iraq war, with the Americans. A war that a majority of Americans is now saying they regret. Where would be today if that had been allowed to happen?

On the other hand, Canada was right to go to Afghanistan – as part of a United Nation and NATO-sponsored mission. The collective, and morally just goal was to put an end to an oppressive regime which—the facts showed – were directly sponsoring international terrorism. The facts showed this.

I am troubled by talk of “Canada’s anti-guerilla war in Afghanistan,” of the attempt to control the media, of the refusal to allow a public honoring of those killed in the service of their country. Canada is in Afghanistan to assist the elected government of the country. The extension of the rule of law. Humanitarian assistance to communities, to women and to children. That is NATO’s mission. The UN mission. And Canada’s mission.

Afghanistan is not a test of our manhood or womanhood. It is a test of our commitment to the just pursuit of international peace and security.

This is how Canada commits, and why Canada is so well-respected in the world today. To me, that is the wise and courageous approach.

In summary, if I was a Member of Parliament I would not give Stephen Harper a blank check in the vote tonight. He is playing politics in forcing a decision without providing adequate information, without an honest review of the political and military situation and with an absolutely artificial critical path. I am left to wonder what deal he has made with the United States.

The men and women of our armed forces must be provided with modern equipment. Planned recruitments of new personnel should proceed.

We all recognize that we have to spend on National Defence and Security. It needs to be measured and balanced. They should be determined by our real needs, not by

industry lobbyists. We have to understand what it is to try and compete with the Conservatives, who would bow endlessly to the defence lobby.

Governing too is about choices. We must have a focused set of priorities. They need to be few in number. But be the right ones.

Quebeckers know that Liberals will always stand for a principled, independent approach to international affairs. And that we are committed to striking a sound balance between defence spending and other priorities.

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.

I do not agree with the view that Canada is broke and needs fixing

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

Canada is a respected leader in the world because of the way it has built a federation in this cold Northern climate, through a thousand projects, and a thousand thoughtful accommodations.

The foundation of Canada is strong, resilient. Quebec has been a leader in this project of nation-building. Together we are ready to do so much more. Here, and abroad. We can compete with the best. In the arts. In business. In science. In building a tolerant, equitable nation.

Before I finish, I would like to talk to you about a young man who entered politics. Who arrived at a very young age at the head of his Party. And to the surprise of most observers ended up the Premier of a great Province, leading an inexperienced government. He made mistakes. He did some good things. He got trounced in the next election. People believed his political future was non-existent. He then spent a decade on diverse projects, writing, thinking, reaching out...

The young man was Robert Bourassa. As we know, he came back. And he surprised everyone.

I knew and came to admire Premier Bourassa when I was Premier of Ontario. I admired his grit and his guts and his integrity. And that fact that he fought back, kept faith, and beat the predictions. He went on to do many more great things for Quebec.

I have learned from Robert that there is a great virtue in resilience. We have a great team. We have good people running for the leadership! Talented, principled, accomplished Liberals.

I face the same question personally. People say, Bob is a good guy, but can he really come back?

No one thought Pierre Trudeau would come back after he was beaten in 1979 by Joe Clark. And he did.

Things change. Determination, sticking to your vision. Sticking to your principles. Having great people on your team. Fighting hard. Speaking the truth. That is what leads to victory.

Like Bourassa, I too have kept a commitment to public service the last ten years. And I am ready. Ready to work with you, ready to fight, ready to bring the Liberals back.

We will come back with the type of progressive, federalist, Liberal vision that I will champion. In Quebec and in all parts of the country.

Harper thinks he will get a majority by uniting the right, and then be in a position to impose a narrow vision on the country. To this I say no way!

We will attain our Liberal majority by uniting the progressives in Quebec and elsewhere, and by calling all Canadians to their better, more generous selves.

Liberals in Quebec have a proud history. 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.

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 Quebec Liberal who is excited by fighting for a progressive vision in every part of the province.

I need every progressive Quebecker who wants to help us achieve our potential to get involved!

I need every Canadian who wants to make a difference to join this great Party.
Thank you.