

THE HARPER GOVERNMENT

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As a Member of Parliament, I have tried not to be too partisan. I respect differences of opinion. I appreciate discussing and debating different policy ideas. I believe that MPs from all parties must work together where we can, despite those differences. And many of us do..

That said, it is critical that every MP respect the rule of law, including all of the Parliamentary rules and limits that we have in Canada in order to ensure that no one person or party can rule unchecked.

That is what makes a democracy.

This should be even clearer to us now, knowing that in other parts of the world people are fighting, often with their lives, for democracy against controlling dictatorships and abuses of power.

Abraham Lincoln once said, " ... if you want to test a man's character, give him power." Stephen Harper's real character is now clear to all Canadians. He is Canada's prime minister, yet he shows no respect for Parliament, or for the collective work that MPs from all parties are striving to accomplish. He has gone too far.

It's important to remember, too, that the blame falls directly at Harper's feet, and not with all Conservatives. I stress that because I have many Conservative friends who are as uncomfortable with what's going as I am. I'm proud to have friends and colleagues in *all* parties – Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Bloc

Québécois, and Green. We respect each other and, more importantly, we respect Parliament.

I want Parliament to work for *all* Canadians. It seems, however, that Harper does not.

Let's review some recent events:

- **"Harper Government:"** Just before the government fell, Harper dictated that all federal departments, boards, agencies, and commissions replace the phrase "Government of Canada" with "The Harper Government." This is extraordinary, and not simply because it's against the rules. Our government is *not* Harper's personal fiefdom. It is the government of *Canada*. If the name "Harper" is to be used at all times instead of "Canada," what will be next if Harper regains government? Huge murals of Harper's face on all government buildings?
- **"Harper Canada:"** Take a look at the graphics on the Conservative campaign plane and bus. It seems "Harper Government" isn't enough for Harper; now it's "Harper Canada." In *huge* letters. It would almost be humorous if it weren't so telling of Harper's view of this country and its government.
- **Contempt:** The Speaker of the House of Commons ruled against the Conservatives not once, not twice, but *three* times: first, for hiding information from Parliament on allegations of torture of Afghan detainees; second, because Minister Bev Oda misled Parliament; and third, because Harper hid from Parliament – *for months* – critical financial information on prisons and corporate tax cuts. This last offence he made despite all efforts on the part of a majority of MPs to get the information needed for us to do our jobs. As the Speaker said, *"This is a serious matter that goes to the heart of the House's undoubted role in holding the government to account."*
- **Harper "impeached":** The loss of confidence of the majority of the House of Commons resulted from the fact that Harper was held in contempt of Parliament. This was the first time – not just in the history of Canada, *but the first time in the history of the entire Commonwealth* – that a government has been found in contempt of Parliament. In the United States, they would call this "impeachment." This is an extremely serious matter. Unfortunately, Harper didn't take it that way. After the fact, he commented that it was "merely a procedural matter that Canadians don't really care about." I completely disagree. But then, I have far, far

more faith in the Canadian people, and in their respect for democracy, than Harper does.

- ***“In-and-out” scandal:*** Four senior Conservative party leaders – including two current senators – could face jail time for orchestrating the infamous Conservative Party “in-and-out” election campaign scandal. The Federal Court of Appeal – one of the highest courts in Canada – has ruled against the Harper Conservatives, and Elections Canada has filed formal charges. This was not a few criminals acting alone for personal gain—which, admittedly, has happened before. This was a concerted scheme created and run by the Conservative Party itself. This in-and-out scandal not only broke election campaign rules, it also allowed “rebates” – coming from taxpayer dollars – to be “given back” to several Conservative ridings that never spent the money in the first place. This is electoral fraud and taxpayer fraud. Nevertheless, the Harper Conservatives have dismissed all of it, calling it an “administrative difference of opinion.” In doing so, they have shown an utter lack of respect for our courts, and for the rule of law.

The Government of Canada is *not* the “Harper Government”, nor is “Harper Canada” *our* Canada. Harper’s Conservatives have defied – indeed have thumbed their noses at – the rules of our Parliament and of our democracy. Yes, I’m a Liberal. But, more importantly, I’m a Canadian who will stand up for our democracy. And I will fight to protect the cornerstones of that democracy—our Parliament and the rule of law.

That fight is now on.