

**Speech by Jack Layton, Leader of Canada's NDP
Empire and Canadian Club, Toronto
November 7, 2005
Check Against Delivery**

Thank you for being here today. I'd like to thank Rod Phillips and Bill Whittaker for the invitation.

I had a speech written for today about how Canada's prosperity depends on investing in people, infrastructure and our environment.

I wanted to build on the thoughts given to an NDP conference a few weeks ago by Paul Summerville, former chief economist for the Royal Bank of Canada. Paul's running for the NDP in the next election, and I'd encourage you to read his thoughts on our website.

I had wanted to continue what Paul had begun, challenging perceptions of the NDP on economic issues – and challenging perceptions of which policies build the innovative, sustainable and prosperous economy the Canada of this century's going to require.

But this week has been a tumultuous one in Ottawa. And events have intervened.

Yet again the scandal that has framed so much of recent political life has come to the fore, in the wake of Justice Gomery's findings into the ethical conduct of the Liberal Party.

So instead, I'm going to speak about the role people gave New Democrats in the last election, and how we've honoured that role.

I want to speak about this Parliament's ability to get things done for people, in particular on the key issues outlined by the NDP some time ago.

And I want to speak about them in the context of Justice Gomery's findings into the conduct of the Liberal Party.

I hope you will appreciate the circumstances that have led to a change in topic. I'll still try and keep it interesting.

During the last campaign, we asked Canadians for a central role in this Parliament. A million more people voted for us. And though doubling our vote didn't double our seats, people did give New Democrats the central role we sought.

On election night, I promised we'd use our role in Parliament wisely. And that we'd be true to our values and to the values of those who voted for us.

Quite simply, we committed to try and get something done in this Parliament for people.

That's what we've done. We proposed what we believe are good ideas – on ethics, the environment, pension protection, employment insurance.

We were constructive.

It wasn't easy. Paul Martin's government more often than not embodied the sense of entitlement that plagues today's Liberal Party. In some instances, it flatly refused to do what a majority of Parliament said.

But in the spring of last year, the minority Liberal government that seemed to think it was entitled to do as it pleased ran into a Parliamentary crisis.

Then, Mr. Martin finally realized that his government was a minority. One that would have to work with others if it hoped to remain in office.

So we proposed changes we believed people wanted to a budget. Not to make it perfect, but to make it better.

Specifically, we took out the corporate tax cuts Mr. Martin didn't tell people about when running for office. And we proposed that money be invested in education and training, in the environment, in housing – including Aboriginal housing; in wage protection for workers whose companies are in trouble, and in increasing foreign aid.

We demonstrated our commitment to balanced budgets and fiscal responsibility. We supported both debt repayment and small business tax reduction.

Our proposals were ultimately accepted. And the first NDP budget in history was well-received.

This is the kind of balance and compromise people expect from the Parliament they elected. It's not always easy, offering to work with another party to get something done.

But I believe it was the right path in the spring. And I also believed it was the right path this fall.

Which is why, a few weeks ago, we made it clear that our preferred path was for Parliament to be productive on issues that matter to people. So our caucus once again set out an agenda for action: Ethics, the environment, pensions, E.I., training among them, but protecting public health care, too.

Because public medicare needs protection.

So well before the current situation, the NDP outlined specific proposals to protect public medicare and improve it. And we drew our inspiration from the principles and proposals set out in the Romanow Report.

We looked for real enforcement and accountability that lets the federal government track its own health care agreements. We looked to end subsidies for doctors practising both in and out of medicare.

And most importantly, we proposed an end to federal subsidies for private, for-profit health care. We called for protection to ensure that funding from Canada's Parliament wouldn't in any way subsidize or support a private, for-profit health system.

In short, we sought real accountability for federal transfers and real consequences when public medicare is undermined.

Last week, late Thursday night, the government responded to our specific proposals.

We've analyzed them over the weekend.

What the government is proposing is unacceptable.

To be fair, the government did go some distance on preventing doctors practising both in and out of medicare. But addressing one issue while failing to address the larger question of privatization isn't enough.

There is no meaningful accountability. No real effort to monitor and track public medicare's decline and private care's rise. And today's Liberal Party is unwilling to attach any conditions to prevent privatization to the funds it currently invests in health.

This isn't good enough for people concerned about the erosion of public medicare. They know dollars are scarce – and they want those dollars going to care for their kids, their parents and themselves. Not spent on profit margins.

These people know the private hospitals we have today are the thin edge of the wedge to the two-tier, private system they don't want and which the Supreme Court accelerated early this year.

They want Canada to protect public medicare that defines how we treat each other. A deeply held value that Canadians hold profoundly, which guides and defines us. Canadians deserve public medicare protected and after a careful consideration of Mr. Martin's proposals, I am forced to conclude his government won't.

So reluctantly, we have sent a response to the government, outlining why we find their proposals unacceptable.

If the content of the government's response to us on private health were a bill before Parliament, we would oppose it. They aren't any better contained in a letter from Health Minister Dosanjh.

So, unfortunately, I don't believe there are grounds to go forward.

And so, unfortunately, for those of us committed to getting things done in this Parliament, there's no basis for our party to express confidence in this government.

Because New Democrats can't express confidence in a government that will not protect public medicare – led by a Liberal Party whose ethical conduct was indicted by Justice Gomery.

We have, repeatedly, demonstrated the balance and compromise people expect.

And we've delivered results for people in the process.

It's what Tommy Douglas did, forcing Liberals to bring in public medicare and public pensions.

It's what David Lewis did, forcing Liberals to build affordable housing and create Petro-Canada.

It's what our caucus did this year in writing the first NDP budget in history.

But now we seem to have reached a serious, fundamental impasse. We were serious about our proposals, but equally serious about needing a response to them. All of them. To go forward.

And the question therefore becomes, how can this Parliament continue? Under the leadership of a Liberal Party whose ethical conduct Justice Gomery indicted— a Liberal Party that once worked with New Democrats to build public medicare, and now flatly rejects rules to protect that achievement.

We cannot express confidence in a government unwilling to act on such a critical issue.

And we cannot express confidence in a government under the leadership of a party that cannot be trusted to clean up the politics it tainted.

In Parliament this week, New Democrats consistently raised instances of the culture of entitlement to which Justice Gomery referred in his report. We received no substantive answers on illegal lobbying, crony appointments and the ongoing blockage of democratic reform. This can't continue.

Therefore, this Parliament's life is likely limited.

Limited not by the choice of any opposition party, but by the unethical behaviour of the Liberal Party.

I believe in these circumstances, Canada should not have to wait to determine how best to get more done. And that the time is approaching – sooner, not later – for the Canadian people to render judgment on the Liberal Party.

In the coming election, I will invite Canadians to judge the NDP's record of getting things done for people in this Parliament. And I'll ask the people of Canada to give us more support – so we can get even more done in the next one.

Because there's so much Canada wants to do together. And I don't accept the false choice between endless broken promises and scandal on one hand – and a party that's wrong on the issues on the other. We can do better together than what we have done, and respond to that desire for this country's government to behave ethically and not just speak about the values that define us. But put them in action once more.

I thank you again for the invitation today.