

The Conservative for all Canadians
Le conservateur pour tous



**An Address by
Tony Clement**

To

A Joint Meeting of

The Canadian Club of Toronto

And

The Empire Club of Canada

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Over the last 6 extraordinary weeks, and especially in the past few days, I have felt that I am participating in a great awakening among Canadians. I have been meeting people who, for ten years, have been trapped in a dream state where there was no choice but to accept the sad and simple fact that they were destined to be misgoverned.

All of you in this room have lived this nightmare. To hear our government say one thing and do another. To hear them mouth commitments to causes like health care or democracy – empty phrases repeated over and over again – while at the same time cutting funding to health care and turning Canada’s civil service into a money laundering operation for taxpayer’s money.

The last six months have seen the nightmare turn almost surreal. The Finance Minister who personally chose to cut health care funding instead of the waste in Ottawa...the Finance Minister who authorized the cheques for the HRDC billion dollar boondoggle...the Finance Minister who gave Sheila Copps her massive Heritage budget and backed Alan Rock’s useless gun registry... is now claiming to represent change and promises that now somehow things will be different.

But in the last few weeks, as Canadians have begun to waken from this horrible dream, the plot has begun to turn against Paul Martin. Police raids of the offices of key Martin operatives in British Columbia– the alarm has started to beep.

Then the disclosure that Canadians were lied to. When asked how much Paul Martin’s company Canada Steamship Lines had received from the federal government in contracts and subsidies, the official answer was \$137,000. Now the truth comes out - \$161 million...it wasn’t a typo...it was a lie. If the truth had been available a year ago, Paul Martin might not be Prime Minister today. This time, Canadians are not hitting the snooze button.

And now...the Auditor General’s report. The closest Canada has come to our very own Enron. Wide scale looting of the taxpayer’s coffers to benefit the friends of the Liberal Party. And Paul Martin was the Chief Financial Officer of this crooked enterprise. As CFO, he was either implicated or incompetent. Either way, he is accountable. Enron’s CFO is on the way to jail. Paul Martin still thinks he deserves to be CEO. Mr. Martin, that ringing in your ears is the sound of Canada’s alarm clock...Canada is awake.

Now, we all know the sad political fact that contributed to the last ten years of Liberal government. The Liberals were gifted their monopoly on power through the split in conservative supporters. Friends, that is about to change. The merger of the Canadian Alliance and the federal Progressive Conservative parties represents a major turning point in the history of our country. In the coming election, Paul Martin and the Liberals will finally be called to account.

But simply merging the two parties will not be enough to unseat the Liberals. Canadians will need to know that they have not only an alternative party to choose from but an alternative to the current Prime Minister.

Change starts with trust, and it starts right at the top. When Canadians cannot trust a Prime Minister's recollections and assertions, it is time for a change. I am offering that credible change that Canadians can trust.

My decision to enter federal politics didn't just happen a few weeks ago. I know from first-hand experience that change and trust go far beyond the headlines of the past weeks. When the federal government offered Canadians nothing more than a deafening silence in the midst of our battle against the SARS virus, I came to learn the hard way how much a lack of national leadership can hurt.

The health care issue may be closest to my heart...and I'm not sure that will be a flaw when I'm Prime Minister...but the refusal of the Chretien-Martin Liberals to work with a province in distress is not unusual in this country. In fact, it's their modus operandi. Whether it was appropriate and stable health care funding, or a national environmental strategy, or transportation infrastructure for our cities, the Chretien-Martin Liberals have been interested more in divide-and-conquer and agenda manipulation than in positive solutions. I have seen this first-hand, having attended 11 federal-provincial conferences in my time. And, as the next Prime Minister, I will change this first.

The constant war between federal and provincial governments is a crucial component of the Liberal strategy to preserve their grip on power. By pitting region against region they have created an environment in which they can pretend to be representing the national interest against regional factions. Our country deserves better than this.

As Prime Minister, I would hold it as my mission to serve the nation by treating the issues raised by our provincial Premiers with the respect they deserve. I would serve as a truly national leader by seeking to bring our Dominion together rather than sowing the seeds of discord and tearing at the very fabric of our federation.

Let me give you three examples of how my vision would work in practice.

For more than 10 years, the Western provinces have sought a fair and reasonable hearing on the issue of an elected Senate. They have been rebuffed. The fact is that when Paul Martin visits the West he mouths the commitment to democratic reform in Canada. But in Ottawa he has already made it clear that he is in favour of democracy – right up until the moment where there might actually be a vote. Let's face facts, he will never move to reform the Senate. I say it's time.

If elected as Prime Minister, I pledge to appoint any Senator elected by a province. And after suitable time to allow for proper scheduling of such elections, I will only fill Senate vacancies in such a manner. I believe those elected will serve our nation much better than Liberal fundraisers and party operatives. I will also support the efforts of interested

provinces in putting forward the constitutional amendment required to finally enact true Senate reform.

Second, the Atlantic Provinces. They have fought for years to secure the revenue from their offshore resources. These non-renewable resources are no different than those which have made Alberta among the wealthiest provinces in Canada. But in the case of the Atlantic, 81 percent of those revenues have been clawed back from federal equalization payments. Let me be blunt: when Finance Minister, Paul Martin always preferred to control the wealth of Atlantic Canada from Ottawa rather than allow the people of those provinces to make their own choices. As Prime Minister, I will end the revenue clawback. It's time.

Enfin, parlons du Québec. Le Québec, dans certains domaines, voudra faire les choses à sa façon et agir selon des priorités qui lui sont propres. Il n'y a là rien d'anormal, rien d'inéquitable, rien de menaçant à l'unité du pays ou la compétitivité de l'économie, bien au contraire.

Il faut mettre un terme au déséquilibre fiscal, qui empêche les provinces de répondre aux besoins prioritaires de tous les Canadiens, lesquels sont des domaines de responsabilité provinciale. Il faut encadrer le pouvoir fédéral de dépenser, sans quoi Ottawa se comportera comme un oncle qui offre aux enfants des jouets tout scintillants, mais qui laisse aux parents la facture salée pour acheter des piles pendant des années.

Et il est temps de mettre un terme aux chicanes concernant les congés parentaux. Québec a sa propre solution, adapté à la réalité contemporaine des travailleurs autonomes. Plus encore, ils sont prêts à avancer l'argent pour mettre sur pied un programme plus généreux. Ce dossier se doit d'être réglé sans traîner. Le temps est venu.

Lorsque je serai chef du Parti conservateur et Premier ministre, je mettrai fin au fédéralisme dominateur du Parti libéral du Canada. Je m'engage à démontrer à nos concitoyens du Québec et du reste du Canada que le fédéralisme canadien peut servir les intérêts des Québécois. Je veux pratiquer le fédéralisme du respect : le respect de la fierté des québécois, des compétences de son gouvernement et d'un certain équilibre fiscal dans la fédération.

Un nouveau siècle. Un nouveau parti. Une nouvelle façon de concevoir le pacte fédéral. Le temps est venu.

Seeing Canada's governments actually work together for the benefit of their citizens, in both official languages, is only part of my vision. Because there are substantial duties and obligations of the federal government in Canada. Later this week, at the Confederation Club in Kitchener, I will be addressing what I see as the priorities for the federal government including tax reform – for this generation and the next. Today, let me move on to talk briefly about how I see Canada's role in the world.

First, I confess that for a Conservative I am a bit of a Pearsonian. Canada's role in peacekeeping makes me proud. And from time to time, Canada can still and should punch above its weight. The global campaign against land mines was a noble cause and I will in genuine non-partisan good faith applaud those Liberals who laboured on that cause's behalf.

But today, even when we punch above our weight, the punch is packing less weight than ever before. That's because with Paul Martin as Finance Minister, our Armed Forces have been starved. The 98 pound weakling we now represent does not have the power we need to achieve the grand aims we should have for the world.

We desperately need to re-invest in our military. We need to grow defence spending at least 3% faster than GDP growth until we abolish the defense deficit – truly reinvest in our military and coast guard. This year, our brave soldiers are in the front lines in the Balkans and in Afghanistan. They, like the nurses and doctors fighting SARs last year, need to be supported. And the decision to have them fly 40 year old Sea Kings and drive 20 year old jeeps with cardboard flooring was made by the same man who has consistently failed our health care workers– the man who wants to be our Liberal Prime Minister for the next 5 years.

We also need to act on our principles on the world stage. I believe that Canada's highest duty is to promote democracy and individual freedom to the nations of this earth not yet so blessed. Today, our Ambassador to the United Nations is more likely to be voting with the dictators and aligned against democracies. And our foreign aid is all too often aimed at nations where we already know the aid does not reach its destination – ending instead in the Swiss accounts of kleptocrats.

Canadians are by their instinct multilateralists. So am I. But today, I have little faith in the United Nations. It has become a talk shop where the world's atrocities are explained away, or swept under the carpet – it has become a substitute for courage and action.

Canada needs to lead again. As a sovereign and respected nation. On the world stage. That means leading the campaign for a renewal of the United Nations – through a new San Francisco Conference - as a body where the nations who champion democracy and freedom can achieve their aims and help those who aspire to those rights and freedoms attain them. It's time.

Finally, our relationship with the United States.

Today, with softwood lumber and BSE as crucial issues facing our nation, our relationship with the United States is in a sad state of disrepair. There are those I know who hope against hope that with Chretien gone things will get better. But there is no reason to believe that change will occur here either. Key Martin backers who hurl vulgarities at the Americans and have therefore inflamed the tense negotiating environment over softwood and BSE - are still in the Liberal Caucus.

As Prime Minister, I will commit our nation to helping secure our continental borders in close collaboration with our greatest friend, ally and neighbour – the United States of America. With a secure border, a re-tooled military and a re-affirmed commitment to fighting for democracy, I am convinced that we can secure the free flow of our goods across the US border and a common sense resolution of the trade issues that have plagued us for so long. We can do better. It's time.

In March, our new Party will make a choice. The last three elections have been won by the Liberals because they were always able to make the election about us instead of them. We have seen this movie again and again over the past 11 years. Make no mistake: if we select a Leader who cannot speak to all Canadians in their native tongue, the Liberals will once again have the chance to run against us instead of us running against them. If we select a Leader who has already put on the record, views about Canada, Quebec and Atlantic Canada that build walls instead of bridges, the election of 2004 will be a replay of 2000.

But with the Auditor General finally exposing the truth in Ottawa, I am convinced that if – and only if - we choose correctly... we can win.

I am ready to go toe to toe with Paul Martin and take this message to the people of Canada. I am ready to put my experience, my bridge-building abilities, my heart and my soul in the service of this, our next great cause.

Canada has an exciting journey ahead of it, one where our values and ideals can be applied to heal our government, mend our federation, and prove valuable to the rest of the world.

This journey is upon us, ready for embarkation, missing only the Leader and Prime Minister who can commence it with vigour, ethical clarity and vision.

Join me and it can be so!

Thank you.