

Prime Minister promotes accountability

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Toronto, Ontario

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Introduction

Honoured Guests of the Head Table
Colleagues from the Parliament of Canada
Members of the Canadian and Empire Clubs
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you.
And thank you, President Whittaker, for your kind opening remarks.

Let me begin by echoing the sincere best wishes to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, who is celebrating her 80th birthday today.

I've had the privilege to meet with Her Majesty, and found her warm, gracious, intelligent and wise.

I was also struck by her knowledge of Canada and her deep affection for this country and its people.

She has been a model of selfless devotion and dignity through over half a century, and I know we all look forward to the continuation of her reign for many years to come.

I am especially honoured to address this joint gathering of the Empire and Canadian Clubs because they are among the oldest and most prestigious forums in our country.

Over the course of your history, you have hosted many of the world's most famous leaders – giants like Winston Churchill, Indira Gandhi, Ronald Reagan, Bill Gates and Margaret Thatcher, as well as virtually every Canadian Prime Minister over the past century.

As a rookie Prime Minister, I am privileged to add my name to your list today.

The Need for Change

But I'm not here to talk about history.

I'm here to talk about change.

On January 23rd, Canadians voted for change.

And they voted for direction.

They tasked our party to lead that change.

And to provide Canada with leadership and direction.

Leadership is not always easy, especially in a minority Parliament.

But I sense a hunger for it among Canadians.

They are tired of talk without action.

Promises without results.

Government that succeeds in taxing, but fails to deliver.

Our Mission

In contrast, our new national government wants to create a clear sense of mission and of purpose:

- To institute reform and accountability in government;
- To establish greater safety and security for individuals and communities.
- To renew our federation and keep our country united, independent, strong and free;
- To provide for Canada a more meaningful role on the world stage; and
- To build a prosperous future – not just for a privileged few – but for all working people and their families.

Our Accomplishments So Far

With these goals in mind, we have had to respond to issues before our government.

We had to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court of Canada.

For the first time in history, we required our nominee to first submit to questions from a committee of elected Members of Parliament.

It was an unprecedented and historic first step forward in delivering greater democracy and transparency to our highest court.

We have responded to developments on the world stage in ways that advance Canada's interests and values.

That's why we led the western world in cutting off funding to Hamas, making it clear that state terrorism is not acceptable.

That's why we added the Tamil Tigers to the list of banned terrorist organizations in Canada, an action that should have been taken years ago.

And that's why we spoke out against the anti-democratic actions of the government of Belarus which included jailing a Canadian journalist for simply doing his job.

It's also why I travelled to Afghanistan, to see the first-hand work done by our diplomats, development officers and defence personnel.

And it is why I remind Canadians, every chance I get, that our men and women in uniform are doing a first-class job delivering humanitarian aid to the Afghan people, demonstrating leadership

in an international mission and defending Canada's values and interest. And those men and women in uniform deserve our unqualified support.

We have also been confronted early with the challenges faced by Canada's farmers, a group urbanites sometimes take for granted but who provide food security for our nation.

The first act of our cabinet was to free up three-quarters of a billion dollars in emergency aid to provide farmers with immediate assistance while we search for longer term solutions.

And last but not least we have laid down clear markers to reassert Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic.

You know, there's an old saying – use it or lose it – and we are not about to forfeit Canada's historical claim to our northern waters.

Our Five Priorities

Ladies and gentlemen, in the election campaign we set out a plan and made commitments.

In the Speech from the Throne, we set out five immediate priorities that we plan to act on this spring.

Today, I want to talk about the Federal Accountability Act, and about the real clean-up we are going to undertake in Ottawa – that's a promise we plan to keep.

Now, of course, Parliament is in session.

And, throughout this session, we will be guided by the five immediate priorities articulated in the Speech from the Throne.

These are the priorities we campaigned on.

These are the priorities Canadians voted for at the ballot box.

And these are priorities we intend to deliver on in the months to come.

These priorities are clearly defined, easy to remember, specific in their outcomes and limited in number.

There are five. Not fifteen. Not fifty. Five.

We know what we want to do.

And we have a plan and a focus to get it done.

Canadians are overtaxed. That's why we will move forward to cut taxes for all Canadians - starting with a cut to the GST from seven to six percent, and eventually to five percent.

The growth in gun, gang and drug crime is unacceptable. That's why we will work to safeguard the Canadian way of life and strengthen the criminal justice system.

Families, parents and children deserve our support. That's why we are replacing a child care program that has funded politicians, researchers and advocates with one that helps families financially and will create real daycare spaces.

We will work with the provinces to establish a Patient Wait Times Guarantee – giving Canadians

the health care they need, when they need it.

And, first of all these priorities, after years of waste, mismanagement and scandal, we will clean up government in Ottawa.

Greater Accountability in Ottawa

Each of our priorities is important. But none is more pressing than cleaning up the mess in politics and government at the federal level.

Accountable, honest, democratic government is the foundation necessary for everything else we wish to build.

The problems of the past – including the systemic fraud and theft documented by the Gomery Inquiry – not only tarnished the reputation of federalism in Quebec; it also cheated and disillusioned taxpayers in all parts of the country.

Something had to be done.

And last week we started the clean-up.

Treasury Board President John Baird tabled our first piece of legislation, the Federal Accountability Act.

The FAA will change the system.

It won't make government perfect because people are not perfect.

But it will provide stronger and clearer rules for governments to follow, and enforce corrections and consequences when things go wrong.

The Federal Accountability Act contains a series of exhaustive measures to clean up government and undertake a real spring cleaning in Ottawa.

Once it is implemented the FAA will:

- Give more power to the Ethics Commissioner, the Auditor General and the Lobbyists Registrar;
- Put an end to the influence of money in federal political parties;
- Prevent former ministers, ministerial staff and senior officials from using their political relationships to profit from their public service;
- Provide ironclad protection to whistleblowers;
- Give the Auditor General the power to monitor federal grants and contributions funding;
- Expand the scope of the Access to Information Act;
- Establish an independent Parliamentary Budget Office;
- Clean up government contracting, polling, procurement and appointments, by establishing a Public Appointments Commission.

To begin with, the Accountability Act will give more power to the various independent Officers of

Parliament.

The scope of the Auditor General's authority will be extended. And she will be given the power to "follow the money" beyond just the billions of dollars in discretionary grants and contributions, to potentially audit the end recipients – a power that may have resulted in detection of the sponsorship scandal years earlier.

- The Lobbyist Registrar will be given greater independence and the ability to end service in government as a stepping stone to private profit. The FAA will do this by, among other things, banning all former Ministers, Ministerial staffers, and senior public officials from lobbying the federal government for five years.

Those in government will be subject to a tougher Conflict of Interest Code, enshrined in law, and enforced by a new Ethics Commissioner with judicial training.

Access to Information will be widely extended. For the first time it will cover the activities of a wide range of agencies, crown corporations and government foundations.

In recent years, Parliament has been hamstrung in its duty to supervise financial measures by a series of flagrantly inaccurate budget estimates and forecasts. The Federal Accountability Act will ensure elected MPs of all parties can have accurate and unbiased budgetary information on which to make decisions by creating an independent Parliamentary Budget Office.

The FAA will also mean an end to the influence of big money in federal political parties. It will ban corporate and union donations to federal political parties, eliminate secret trust funds for politicians and limit individual donations to parties to \$1,000 per year. There will be no more private cocktail parties where the Prime Minister or other Ministers make themselves available for \$5,000 a ticket.

When things do go wrong in government, we will not drive out those who expose wrongdoing, as the former government did. The Federal Accountability Act will provide ironclad protection to whistleblowers.

And the FAA will clean up federal advertising, contracting, procurement, polling and government appointments.

Creating a Public Appointments Commission

Specifically, we will make sure that all federal appointments are necessary, and that selection is fair and based on merit.

Along these lines our accountability measures will include the establishment of a Public Appointments Commission.

For too long, the process of selecting the people for federal government boards, agencies and crown corporations has been based almost exclusively on patronage and cronyism.

Let me be clear: governments should be able to appoint people who support their agenda – that is not the issue – but the jobs should be real, the net should be cast widely and qualifications should be brought to the table beyond mere partisan loyalty.

From now on, the appointments process throughout government will be supervised by the Public Appointments Commission, an independent five-member body.

Its job is not to make appointments, but to ensure that objective criteria is established for positions, along with appropriate processes for recruitment and selection across government

departments and agencies.

Establishing this framework will be a big job, but it will be essential to transforming Ottawa from what Judge Gomery called a “culture of entitlement” to a new culture of accountability.

And I’m very pleased to be able to announce today that a prominent Canadian has agreed to take on the job of founding chairman of the Public Appointments Commission. That individual is with us today, so let me introduce Mr. Gwyn Morgan.

I can’t tell you how delighted I was when Gwyn accepted my invitation to take on this job for the people of Canada.

People of his calibre are rare in this or any country. As you know, he recently retired as president and CEO of EnCana Corporation after an outstanding 30-year career in the oilpatch.

Gwyn built Encana into one of the largest public companies in Canada and the biggest natural gas producer on the continent. Throughout his career he has been a champion of accountability and ethics in the private and public sectors.

In short, there is no one better qualified to oversee a better, more transparent, more professional selection process for government appointments across all federal departments and agencies.

And, what’s more, he’s going to do the job for a dollar a year.

So, Gwyn, on behalf of the people of Canada, thank you.

Opposition to Greater Accountability in Ottawa

Ladies and gentlemen, we want to pass the Federal Accountability Act, but we have a minority government, and so we need help to implement the reforms the Act will entail.

We have no illusions. The federal Liberal party will never support these changes. The Liberals will do everything in their power to block them, both in the House and in the Senate, because they will put a permanent stop to the culture of entitlement.

We need the support of the other parties to establish a culture of accountability, and we need you, members of the public, to tell them you want Parliament to pass the Federal Accountability Act.

Friends, I have to remind you that, in this minority Parliament, passage of the Federal Accountability Act is not a done deal.

I expect there to be some refining of the proposals as they go through the parliamentary process, and I hope we will get some useful suggestions from members of the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Quebecois.

However, I notice that members of the previous government have been particularly vicious in their criticism.

But their complaints are all over the map.

Sometimes they say the FAA goes too far.

Then they say it doesn’t go far enough.

They say there is too much in the Act, and then there’s not enough.

But my friends, let me remind you of one thing. There are over 250 sections to this legislation.

And what do they all have in common? What they have in common is that the Liberal Party did not want to enact a single one of them when they were in power.

And now some Liberal Senators are threatening to delay the bill in the Upper House.

That's something, even for the Liberal Party – unelected political appointees blocking legislation to make Parliament more accountable.

Apparently they have concerns that the FAA will put the Senate under the same Conflict of Interest Code as the Commons, and they don't like that it will create an independent Director of Public Prosecutions.

After the sponsorship scandal, why am I not surprised?

Ladies and gentlemen, the Liberal Party, in either House of Parliament contemplating blocking or delaying the Accountability Act is intolerable.

And it is particularly offensive given that the Act is in significant measure a response to their actions.

Actions they first denied.

Actions later confirmed by a judicial inquiry.

Actions the Canadian people passed judgment on back in January.

Listening to some members of the previous government, you'd think January 23rd never happened.

In fact, you'd think the sponsorship scandal never happened.

But it did.

And we have to do something to clean up politics and government.

We have to do something to ensure greater respect for the law and for taxpayers' dollars.

We have to do something to rebuild the image of federalism in the province of Quebec.

Now, I can understand why members of the previous government are being obstructionist on the FAA.

It threatens how they raise money.

It threatens the way they conducted business between lobbyists and government.

It threatens the way they reward their friends.

It threatens the ability of politicians to cover up mistakes once they happen and to get to the bottom of what has happened.

That's why they will try to pick the Act apart.

That's why they will work to defeat it.

But we will not be defeated or deterred.

Because this is what Canadians want.

They've had enough of phoney nit-picking.

They've had enough of silly excuses as to why we can't clean up Ottawa.

They're telling us to get on with the program.

And pass this Bill.

I say to Mr. Graham and his Liberal colleagues, you have a choice to make.

And Canadians are watching.

It's that simple.

Building a Better Canada

Ladies and gentlemen, Canada's new national government will keep the commitments it made to Canadians.

Canadians are entitled to have a responsible government.

We will set an example and keep our promises.

Friends, Canadians are tired of scandal, inaction and empty promises.

They want leadership on accountability.

Leadership on lowering their taxes.

Leadership in the fight against crime.

Leadership on delivering real results for ordinary working people.

And leadership in keeping Canada – our Canada – strong, united, independent and free.

Friends, we know what we have to do.

We know what we want to achieve.

And we believe ordinary Canadians – the people who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules – are with us.

But it's a minority Parliament so we're going to need your help.

If you want greater accountability and clean government in Ottawa, phone, email or visit your MP and tell them to get the Federal Accountability Act passed.

If you want to see tax relief, tell your MP you want them to support a cut in the GST and to cut taxes for all Canadians.

And if you want real results for working families, and a tougher approach to crime, tell your MP you want them to support us in making our families stronger and communities safer.

All of which are vital if we are to build a stronger, better Canada.

Friends, your government wants to move this country forward, by providing direction, focus and leadership.

We know that, if we act with conviction and determination as a nation, the best is still yet to come for Toronto, for Ontario and for all parts of this great country.

Together, I am confident that we can achieve great things.

Thank you.

God bless Canada.