

**ADDRESS BY STEPHEN HARPER
DISCOURS DE STEPHEN HARPER**

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**– CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –
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I grew up here in Toronto. I went to public school in Leaside – back in the days when my family could afford to live in Leaside – and to high school in Etobicoke. My father worked at Imperial Oil, just up on St. Clair.

I did not grow up in the halls of power. I was not born into a powerful or political family. And so to find myself asked to speak at the Empire and Canadian Clubs is quite an honour.

There are great changes happening in federal politics, and it is great to have one united conservative opposition party in this country!

There are achievements of which I am proud as Leader of the Opposition. When I took over, there were 3 conservative parties in House of Commons. Mine – the Alliance – had two caucuses of its own. They were all up to their eyeballs in red ink, and so immersed in fighting over “conservative unity” that they didn’t stand for anything between them.

Today, we have one party, with money in the bank, and with a caucus that has been focused, disciplined, and offering alternative directions for the country.

In the past several years, we have taken strong positions – on foreign affairs and defence, criminal justice, democratic reform, federal budgets and equalization to name just a few.

Today I am releasing a position paper on environmental policy. It deals with proposals to improve air quality and reduce smog; to afeeguard oceans from polluters; to clean up contaminated waste sites and brownfields; to give farmers access to environmentally friendly chemicals; and to co-ordinate strategies into the development of alternative energy.

We offer this as an alternative to the Liberals’ obsession with the Kyoto Accord, an agreement which, if ever implemented, will cost us billions of dollars and do nothing to make our air cleaner, our water purer, or preserve our precious natural heritage. What’s worse, it encourages Canadian companies to move activities to countries with much worse track records than our own on environmental matters.

When I first accepted the invitation to speak today, I was planning to speak about the environment. But, given the events of the past week, I think that you would all be disappointed if I were to not speak about the increasingly serious political crisis in Ottawa.

One week ago today, the Auditor-General was finally allowed to release her latest report. In the seven days since then, the Paul Martin government has been in turmoil over its findings about corruption in his government, and Mr. Martin’s public support has plummeted every single day.

That report of the Auditor-General actually contained many revelations, any one of which, on its own, would have made for a week of headlines about Liberal incompetence and waste. For example, the Auditor-General reported that in 2002-03 the federal Liberals used your tax money to pay for partisan election-planning polls. In any other year, that finding, on its own, would have been a serious scandal and kept everyone in Ottawa tied up in knots for at least a week.

To take another example, the Auditor General also reported that the federal government spent seven million dollars hiring consultants to help Indian bands in financial trouble without open bidding for the work, and without much assessment of their work. In some cases, the consultants did nothing other than visit bands twice a month to deliver the cheques.

Of course, we already knew that this country's aboriginal policy is a scandalous blight on our national reputation, but in any other year, this new finding, on its own, would also have been a serious scandal.

To take yet another example, the Auditor General reported last week on how the Liberals signed an untendered contract, approved by a committee on which Paul Martin sat, to spend \$100 million dollars replacing the Prime Minister's luxury jets with even more luxurious jets. This, at a time when our overstretched and overworked Armed Forces must make due with ancient, rusted out, dangerous equipment every day of the week. Again, in any other year, that finding, on its own, would have been a serious scandal.

And so, it is a measure of the moral bankruptcy of this government that these scandals have hardly even been noticed this past week, pushed off the front pages by a scandal of even more devastating proportions – a scandal that has rocked Ottawa and the country. That is, of course, the scandal of the Liberal government's sponsorships program.

By now, you know the basic story line.

Après que les Québécois ont presque voté « OUI » au référendum de 1995, le gouvernement a établi un programme de \$250 millions, un programme qui était supposé promouvoir l'unité canadienne.

They did this primarily by sponsoring public events, running a bunch of ads, and plastering Canadian flags everywhere, but primarily in Quebec. To start with, let's admit that this was a dubious effort.

L'idée qu'un quart d'un milliard de dollars de drapeaux canadiens et de publicité peut rattacher les Québécois au Canada est une insulte – une insulte aux contribuables Canadiens, franchement, c'est une insulte envers les Québécois. Bien sur, aussitôt que le programme a été établi est mis en marche que des firmes de publicité libérales au Québec ont reçu plus de \$100 millions en commissions pour avoir livré de cheques, faire des photocopies de rapports déjà écrits, ou simplement rien faire du tout.

The government used “highly questionable methods” to transfer sponsorship funding to Crown corporations and pay hefty commissions to ad agencies while hiding the source of the funding and the true nature of the transactions. The RCMP, as we already knew, is already investigating the Liberal Party itself in connection with this scandal.

I think we can all see that the Liberals used national unity as an excuse to funnel *your* tax dollars to a bunch of their cronies, hacks and spin doctors. Why? We suspect, to funnel funds to a cash-strapped Liberal Party at the time of the last election campaign.

You will recall that when news of this scandal first surfaced, when the Auditor General first made her famous comment – it “broke every rule in the book” – Jean Chrétien dismissed my complaints about his management of the program. Who cares, he said, if a few million were stolen; he was busy saving the country.

At the time, he refused our demand for a public inquiry, but finally agreed to a more limited review by the Auditor General.

The Auditor-General was finally allowed to release this report last week, and since then, Paul Martin has looked pretty shaky.

Last Tuesday, he said that he was angry at the massive scale of this corruption scandal, and told us that the country needs to get to the bottom of things by calling a public inquiry *after all* – but one to be completed only after the next election.

But then, Canadians started to see through this communications strategy.

How on earth could Paul Martin, supposedly Canada's most competent Finance Minister, ever the pillar of the Chrétien government, not have known what was going on? Was he just asleep at the switch? On Wednesday, in response to an explosion of anger from coast to coast, he stood up in the House of Commons and blamed the entire scandal on a small cabal of civil servants, working clever little plots to hide their tracks.

But then, Canadians saw through this communications strategy as well. The people running this program weren't enriching *themselves* – they were enriching people connected to the Liberal Party.

Surely, people demanded to know, the corruption involved people at the political level. And if it did, again, how could Paul Martin, as the most senior Liberal cabinet member in Québec, not have known what was going on?

On Thursday, Paul Martin decided to lay all the blame at Jean Chrétien's feet. He never sought Mr. Martin's advice, you know; he never let him play any role in government policy. But he wasn't quite saying that Mr. Chrétien was a crook. There just had to be *some* political direction...

Then on Friday came news that the Auditor-General questioned several cabinet ministers, including Ralph Goodale, Mr. Martin's own finance minister, as well as a number of current and former senior civil servants. Mr. Martin himself had been warned about the extent of the scandal years ago.

Enter the next communications strategy. Mr. Martin will resign if he is implicated, except that – and here's the latest public outrage – he wants the public to guarantee him four more years in a snap election call before the facts are known. (Frankly, with the history of Liberal obstruction of public inquiries, the facts likely never be known if the Liberals are re-elected.)

With each new day of outrage and anger and disbelief across the country, Mr. Martin's senior aides were calling reporters and browbeating them for asking too many questions about Martin's role in this scandal.

Why did the Prime Minister look so shaken last week? Because, as the Auditor General reminded us, the rot in Ottawa goes deep. We have seen scandal after scandal after scandal from this Liberal government. So many scandals, that today, there is hardly a part of the federal government that is not compromised: the Prime Minister's Office, the Finance Department, Public Works, VIA Rail, Canada Post, the Business Development Bank, the Privacy Commissioner's Office, HRDC, and now even the RCMP itself.

Paul Martin was also shaken because he has not yet been completely truthful with the Canadian people. He keeps changing his strategies and his stories from day to day, and no one – not even Sheila Copps – thinks that he is levelling with us yet.

With all this corruption and sleaze going on, where was Paul Martin? Where was the Prime Minister in all this? Paul Martin is in denial. He blames some civil servants; he blames Alfonso Gagliano; he blames Jean Chrétien; he complains that he was never consulted. He was, after all, just the Finance Minister – only the most powerful guy in the Chrétien government.

He would have you believe that he was just an ordinary party member. (Mind you, a member taking control of every Liberal riding association from coast to coast to coast, his operatives monitoring Liberal operations in every corner of this vast country and reporting back to him on his coup against Jean Chrétien.)

Now Martin wants us to believe that he didn't know that his government had turned the Government of Canada into a massive machine for sucking up our tax dollars and depositing them in Liberal bank accounts? I don't believe it. And neither do you.

Paul Martin is up to his neck in this mess.

He says that he is shocked. Just as he was shocked a few weeks ago to find the British Columbia wing of his organization to be tied up with two shady operators now at the centre of a drug-running and money laundering probe. Just as he was shocked to discover that the federal government had claimed Paul Martin's business empire only did \$100,000-plus worth of federal business; it turns out it was more like \$150-million-plus.

But let me remind you of the truth of the matter. Paul Martin was the Finance Minister throughout all of this. He was the one writing the cheques. But he did more. He sat on the government's Management Board, which is directed to oversee the design and delivery of departmental spending programs, including approval and assessment of the sponsorship program itself. Now he tells us that he wasn't keeping track of where the money was going. Do you believe that?

Paul Martin was the most powerful minister in cabinet throughout all of this, and the most powerful minister from Quebec. Now he tells us that Chrétien kept him out of the loop on Liberal business in Quebec. Tell me, do you believe that?

Paul Martin controlled every arm of the Liberal Party from coast to coast. He had an iron grip on every riding in Quebec. His operatives fed intelligence back to him every day of every week during his decade-long leadership race. And now he says that he didn't know what was going on. Do you really believe that?

Paul Martin's line, to quote one MP, is that "he is blameless because he is clueless." The bottom line is that Paul Martin either knew something or he chose not to know. And, I should add that in the Criminal Code, wilful ignorance is not a valid excuse.

Enfin, la semaine passée, un autre député libéral ontarien (Joe Cormuzzi) a dit – « C'est une affaire du Québec et je suppose que c'est la façon de faire au Québec ». Franchement, ces propos sont inqualifiables. M. Cormuzzi, pensez-vous insulter les Québécois encore d'avantage? Au contraire, ce n'est pas la façon de faire la politique au Québec, c'est la façon de faire la politique

du parti Libéral partout au Canada. Les Canadiens et les Québécois méritent un gouvernement qui ne va pas les insulter mais qui va les respecter.

Liberal MP Joe Comuzzi said, “That is a Québec issue and I guess that’s how they do politics there!” I disagree. This is a *Liberal* issue, and that’s how *they* do politics.

Mr. Martin now has a choice, and not a good one. He can plunge the country into a snap election in the hope of putting off revelation of the truth about this scandal into the distant future. Or he can spend the next few months trying to manage the communications mess of the culture of corruption that is endemic in the Liberal government.

Paul Martin is just not up for that job. He can’t get it done. He’s in too deep.

Building the Conservative Party of Canada

Fortunately, on our side, we have not spent the last two years standing still. I have been preparing my colleagues to fight an election and to govern the country. Peter MacKay was doing the same with his colleagues. And now we have pooled our efforts.

Imagine if we could spend the next few months and years not trying to fix the rot in the current government, but, instead, taking the country in the direction of real change.

I do not believe that we have the government Canada deserves. But think of our opportunities! We have a country with all the incredible wealth of the land God gave us – and with the enterprise of the hard-working people who have come, in a very short period of time, from all corners of the earth.

If we had the government that we deserve, we would create a country that rewards independent citizens, not political cronies.

We would have a country that cuts taxes for its families, instead of building legacies for its leaders. We would have a country that aims to be the lowest-taxing economy in the advanced world, not the highest-spending one.

We would have a country where Ottawa ensures that other governments could fix things like health care and infrastructure, instead of hoarding money for scandals and boondoggles.

It would be a country with a strong national defence, with real power, with powerful allies, and with a say internationally – not one that neglects its friends and citizens, and turns a blind eye to evil in the world.

We would have a country that would stand for the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens, families and taxpayers, not just those of criminals, special interests and political elites. We would have a country that reforms every aspect of its democracy until we had the best 21st-century system of government, instead of the best 19th-century system.

We would have a country built on solid conservative values, not expensive Liberal promises.

That is the country I want to lead.