

My View – By Maria Minna



Stephen Harper does not believe in the kind of Canada that most Canadians believe in—a Canada in which the federal government plays a positive role in improving the lives of all Canadians.

Canadians believe in a strong just society, strong public health care, equality for all, respect for human rights and a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protects all Canadians including all minorities from prejudice, racism, and inequality. A Canada with strong democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law with an independent judiciary that is respected all over the world, shared wealth, an obligation to help make our world a better and safer place through our foreign aid and peace keeping efforts.

Over decades together we have built a just and compassionate country. We are proud of what we have done. We know that there is a great deal more to do to ensure that every Canadian enjoys the best quality of life that we can provide. We built this country this way because Canadians truly wanted a country that shares its wealth and resources among all of its citizens.

As a country, we have been fortunate to have strong visionaries as leaders such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Lester B. Pearson (the father of most of our modern social infrastructure), and Pierre Trudeau.

However, after watching Harper for 13 years, as a young Reform MP in the House of Commons, as the head of the right-wing National Citizen's Coalition, as Leader of the Canadian Alliance and now as Prime Minister, I know that he does not believe in any of our shared values. He has an entirely different vision for this country.

Harper failed to stand up for a united Canada during the last referendum. He demanded that former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien accept 50% plus one vote as enough to negotiate the break-up of our country. He described the Kyoto Protocol as "a socialist scheme to suck money out of wealth-producing nations... [The Accord is] based on tentative and contradictory scientific evidence about climate trends." He wrote a letter to the Chicago Tribune apologizing to the Americans for Canada not joining the war on Iraq.

Now I watch him as he dismantles desperately needed national programs such as the former Liberal government's \$5 billion early learning and child care initiatives and puts thousands of child care spaces at risk with no hope of future expansion (in Ontario there are now 11,000 spaces at risk with over 3,300 at risk in Toronto). Toronto is also hard hit and a recent report shows that the increasing level of poverty in the city can in part be attributed to the lack of child care.

Having worked for 10 years to ensure that we had a national child care program, I am extremely angered by Harper's destructive actions.

Harper shut down \$5 billion of environmental programs which had been put in place by the former Liberal government and then -- when the polls turned against him and the public demanded action on global warming -- he reinstated some of the programs but changed the names.

I watch in horror as Harper politicizes the selection of the judiciary, as he eradicates women's equality programs, as he kills the ability of citizens to challenge the government on policies or laws that discriminate by killing the Court Challenges Program, as he plays games with the Homelessness (SCPI) Fund by letting it run out of money in March and causing organizations working for the homeless to shut their doors, as he starves the affordable housing program by spending only \$800 million of the \$1.6 billion passed in the 2005 budget.

The Canadian judicial system is one of the most respected in the world. It is admired for its professionalism, impartiality and freedom from partisan political influence. Its judgments are referred to regularly by the South Africans, Australians, and even Americans. This is why our jurists are coveted for international bodies such as the International Criminal Court which Canada's Louise Arbour sat on as Chief Prosecutor. Our judges are working in many developing countries to establish or strengthen their judicial systems to ensure their independence and objectivity in their work. A strong democracy can only exist with the respect for the rule of law and an independent judiciary.

Harper has now politicized the selection process of judges in order to have only judges that believe in his right-wing "hard-on-crime" ideology. Harper said in the House of Commons "We want to make sure we are bringing forward laws to

make sure that we crack down on crime, that we make our streets and communities safer. ***We want to make sure our selection of judges is in correspondence with those objectives.***"

If he wants to influence the sentencing he should deal with it through legislation not by stacking the courts. Change the law, not the judges.

It is clear that Harper wants to change our culture to a more far-right Republican state. The changes he has already made to our social programs and institutions are a major step in that wrong-headed direction.

As your Member of Parliament, I will do everything in my power to stop this man from destroying our country.