

= Stephen Harper =

Stephen Joseph Harper PC MP (born April 30 , 1959) is a Canadian politician and member of Parliament who served as the 22nd Prime Minister of Canada , from February 6 , 2006 to November 4 , 2015 . He was the first prime minister to come from the modern Conservative Party of Canada , which was formed by a merger of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance .

Harper has been the member of parliament for the riding of Calgary Heritage in Alberta , since 2002 (previously known as Calgary Southwest from 2002 to 2015) . Earlier , from 1993 to 1997 , he was the MP for Calgary West , representing the Reform Party of Canada . He was one of the founding members of the Reform Party , but did not seek re @-@ election in the 1997 federal election . Harper instead joined and later led the National Citizens Coalition , a conservative lobbyist group . In 2002 , he succeeded Stockwell Day as leader of the Canadian Alliance , the successor to the Reform Party and returned to parliament as Leader of the Opposition . In 2003 , he reached an agreement with Progressive Conservative leader Peter MacKay for the merger of their two parties to form the Conservative Party of Canada . He was elected as the party 's first leader , in March 2004 .

The 2006 federal election resulted in a minority government led by the Conservative Party with Harper becoming the 22nd Prime Minister of Canada . By proportion of seats , this was Canada 's smallest minority government since Confederation . Despite this , it was the longest @-@ serving minority government overall . In the 2008 federal election , the Conservative Party won a stronger minority , showing a small increase in the percentage of the popular vote and increased representation in the Canadian House of Commons , with 143 of 308 seats . The 40th Canadian Parliament was dissolved in March , 2011 , after a no @-@ confidence vote that deemed the Cabinet to be in contempt of parliament . In the federal election that followed , the Conservatives won a majority government , the first since the 2000 federal election ; the party won 166 seats , an increase of 23 seats from the October 2008 election .

Though Harper won his seat of Calgary @-@ Heritage in the October 19 , 2015 , federal election , the Conservative Party was defeated by the Liberal Party of Canada , led by Justin Trudeau , who was sworn @-@ in as Harper 's successor on November 4 , 2015 . Harper resigned as party leader on October 19 , 2015 , and the Conservative Party caucus chose an interim leader , Rona Ambrose , on November 5 , 2015 , to serve until a leadership election . Harper moved back to Calgary , Alberta , and commuted to Ottawa as an opposition backbench member of parliament .

= = Early life and education = =

Harper was born and raised in Leaside , Toronto , the first of three sons of Margaret (née Johnston) and Joseph Harris Harper , an accountant at Imperial Oil . The Harper family traces its ancestry back to Yorkshire , England , with Christopher Harper emigrating from Yorkshire to Nova Scotia in 1784 , where he later served as justice of the peace in the area that is now New Brunswick .

Harper attended Northlea Public School and , later , John G. Althouse Middle School and Richview Collegiate Institute , both in Central Etobicoke . He graduated in 1978 , and was a member of Richview Collegiate 's team on Reach for the Top , a television quiz show for Canadian high school students . Harper enrolled at the University of Toronto but dropped out after two months . He then moved to Edmonton , Alberta , where he found work in the mail room at Imperial Oil . Later , he advanced to work on the company 's computer systems . He took up post @-@ secondary studies again at the University of Calgary , where he completed a bachelor 's degree in economics in 1985 . He later returned there to earn a master 's degree in economics , completed in 1991 . Harper has kept strong links to the University of Calgary . Harper is the first prime minister since Joe Clark without a law degree .

= = Political beginnings = =

Harper became involved in politics as a member of his high school 's Young Liberals Club . He later changed his political allegiance because he disagreed with the National Energy Program (NEP) of

Pierre Trudeau 's Liberal government . He became chief aide to Progressive Conservative MP Jim Hawkes in 1985 , but later became disillusioned with the party and the government of Brian Mulroney , especially the administration 's fiscal policy and its inability to fully revoke the NEP until 1986 . He left the PC Party that same year .

He was then recommended by the University of Calgary 's economist Bob Mansell to Preston Manning , the founder and leader of the Reform Party of Canada . At that time Harper " didn 't see himself as a politician " , Mansell told CBC News in 2002 , adding , " Politics was not his first love . "

Manning invited him to participate in the party , and Harper gave a speech at Reform 's 1987 founding convention in Winnipeg . He became the Reform Party 's Chief Policy Officer , and he played a major role in drafting the 1988 election platform . He is credited with creating Reform 's campaign slogan , " The West wants in ! "

Harper ran for the Canadian House of Commons in the 1988 federal election , appearing on the ballot as Steve Harper in Calgary West and losing by a wide margin to Hawkes , his former employer . After Reform candidate Deborah Grey was elected as the party 's first MP in a 1989 by @-@ election , Harper became Grey 's executive assistant , and was her chief adviser and speechwriter until 1993 . He remained prominent in the Reform Party 's national organization in his role as policy chief , encouraging the party to expand beyond its Western base , and arguing that strictly regional parties were at risk of being taken over by radical elements . He delivered a speech at the Reform Party 's 1991 national convention , in which he condemned extremist views .

Harper 's relationship with Manning became strained in 1992 , because of conflicting strategies over the Charlottetown Accord . Harper opposed the Accord on principle for ideological reasons , while Manning was initially more open to compromise . Harper also criticized Manning 's decision to hire Rick Anderson as an adviser , believing that Anderson was not sufficiently committed to the Reform Party 's principles . He resigned as policy chief in October , 1992 .

Harper stood for office again in the 1993 federal election , and defeated Jim Hawkes amid a significant Reform breakthrough in Western Canada . His campaign likely benefited from a \$ 50 @,@ 000 print and television campaign organized by the National Citizens Coalition against Hawkes , although the NCC did not endorse Harper directly .

= = Reform MP (1993 ? 97) = =

Harper emerged a prominent member of the Reform Party caucus . He was active on constitutional issues during his first parliament , and played a prominent role in drafting the Reform Party 's strategy for the 1995 Quebec referendum . A long @-@ standing opponent of centralized federalism , he stood with Preston Manning in Montreal to introduce a twenty @-@ point plan to " decentralize and modernize " Canada in the event of a " no " victory . Harper later argued that the " no " side 's narrow plurality was a worst @-@ case scenario , in that no @-@ one had won a mandate for change .

Harper has expressed socially conservative views on some issues . In 1994 , he opposed plans by federal Justice Minister Allan Rock to introduce spousal benefits for same @-@ sex couples . Citing the recent failure of a similar initiative in Ontario , he was quoted as saying , " What I hope they learn is not to get into it . There are more important social and economic issues , not to mention the unity question . " Harper also spoke against the possibility of the Canadian Human Rights Commission or the Supreme Court changing federal policy in these and other matters .

At the Reform Party 's 1994 policy convention , Harper was part of a small minority of delegates who voted against restricting the definition of marriage to " the union of one man and one woman " . He actually opposed both same @-@ sex marriage and mandated benefits for same @-@ sex couples , but argued that political parties should refrain from taking official positions on these and other " issues of conscience " .

Harper was the only Reform MP to support the creation of the Canadian Firearms Registry at second reading in 1995 , although he later voted against it at third reading stage . He said at the time that he initially voted for the registry because of a poll showing that most of his constituents supported it , and added that he changed his vote when a second poll showed the opposite result . It

was reported in April , 1995 , that some Progressive Conservatives opposed to Jean Charest 's leadership wanted to remove both Charest and Manning , and unite the Reform and Progressive Conservative parties under Harper 's leadership .

Despite his prominent position in the party , Harper 's relationship with the Reform Party leadership was frequently strained . In early 1994 , he criticized a party decision to establish a personal expense account for Manning at a time when other Reform MPs had been asked to forego parliamentary perquisites . He was formally rebuked by the Reform executive council despite winning support from some MPs . His relationship with Manning grew increasingly fractious in the mid @-@ 1990s , and he pointedly declined to express any opinion on Manning 's leadership during a 1996 interview . This friction was indicative of a fundamental divide between the two men : Harper was strongly committed to conservative principles and opposed Manning 's inclinations toward populism , which Harper saw as leading to compromise on core ideological matters .

These tensions culminated in late 1996 when Harper announced that he would not be a candidate in the next federal election . He resigned his parliamentary seat on January 14 , 1997 , the same day that he was appointed as a vice @-@ president of the National Citizens Coalition (NCC) , a conservative think @-@ tank and advocacy group . He was promoted to NCC president later in the year .

In April , 1997 , Harper suggested that the Reform Party was drifting toward social conservatism and ignoring the principles of economic conservatism . The Liberal Party lost seats but managed to retain a narrow majority government in the 1997 federal election , while Reform made only modest gains .

= = Out of parliament = =

= = = 1997 ? 2000 = = =

Soon after leaving parliament , Harper and Tom Flanagan co @-@ authored an opinion piece entitled " Our Benign Dictatorship " , which argued that the Liberal Party only retained power through a dysfunctional political system and a divided opposition . Harper and Flanagan argued that national conservative governments between 1917 and 1993 were founded on temporary alliances between Western populists and Quebec nationalists , and were unable to govern because of their fundamental contradictions . The authors called for an alliance of Canada 's conservative parties , and suggested that meaningful political change might require electoral reforms such as proportional representation . " Our Benign Dictatorship " also commended Conrad Black 's purchase of the Southam newspaper chain , arguing that his stewardship would provide for a " pluralistic " editorial view to counter the " monolithically liberal and feminist " approach of the previous management .

Harper remained active in constitutional issues . He was a prominent opponent of the Calgary Declaration on national unity in late 1997 , describing it as an " appeasement strategy " against Quebec nationalism . He called for federalist politicians to reject this strategy , and approach future constitutional talks from the position that " Quebec separatists are the problem and they need to be fixed " . In late 1999 , Harper called for the federal government to establish clear rules for any future Quebec referendum on sovereignty . Some have identified Harper 's views as an influence on the Chrétien government 's Clarity Act .

As president of the NCC from 1998 to 2002 , Harper launched an ultimately unsuccessful legal battle against federal election laws restricting third @-@ party advertising . He led the NCC in several campaigns against the Canadian Wheat Board , and supported Finance Minister Paul Martin 's 2000 tax cuts as a positive first step toward tax reform .

In 1997 , Harper delivered a controversial speech on Canadian identity to the Council for National Policy , a conservative American think tank . He made comments such as " Canada is a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term , and very proud of it " , " if you 're like all Americans , you know almost nothing except for your own country . Which makes you probably knowledgeable about one more country than most Canadians " , and " the NDP [New Democratic

Party] is kind of proof that the Devil lives and interferes in the affairs of men . " These statements were made public and criticized during the 2006 election . Harper argued that the speech was intended as humour , and not as serious analysis .

Harper considered campaigning for the Progressive Conservative Party leadership in 1998 , after Jean Charest left federal politics . Among those encouraging his candidacy were senior aides to Ontario Premier Mike Harris , including Tony Clement and Tom Long . He eventually decided against running , arguing that it would " burn bridges to those Reformers with whom I worked for many years " and prevent an alliance of right @-@ wing parties from taking shape . Harper was sceptical about the Reform Party 's United Alternative initiative in 1999 , arguing that it would serve to consolidate Manning 's hold on the party leadership . He also expressed concern that the UA would dilute Reform 's ideological focus .

= = = 2000 ? 01 = = =

When the United Alternative created the Canadian Alliance in 2000 as a successor party to Reform , Harper predicted that Stockwell Day would defeat Preston Manning for the new party 's leadership . He expressed reservations about Day 's abilities , however , and accused Day of " [making] adherence to his social views a litmus test to determine whether you 're in the party or not " . Harper endorsed Tom Long for the leadership , arguing that Long was best suited to take support from the Progressive Conservative Party . When Day placed first on the first ballot , Harper said that the Canadian Alliance was shifting " more towards being a party of the religious right " .

After the death of Pierre Trudeau in 2000 , Harper wrote an editorial criticizing Trudeau 's policies as they affected Western Canada . He wrote that Trudeau " embraced the fashionable causes of his time , with variable enthusiasm and differing results " , but " took a pass " on the issues that " truly defined his century " . Harper subsequently accused Trudeau of promoting " unabashed socialism " , and argued that Canadian governments between 1972 and 2002 had restricted economic growth through " state corporatism " .

After the Canadian Alliance 's poor showing in the 2000 election , Harper joined with other Western conservatives in co @-@ authoring a document called the " Alberta Agenda " . The letter called on Alberta to reform publicly funded health care , replace the Canada Pension Plan with a provincial plan and replace the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with a provincial police force . It became known as the " firewall letter " , because it called on the provincial government to " build firewalls around Alberta " to stop the federal government from redistributing its wealth to less affluent regions . Alberta Premier Ralph Klein agreed with some of the letter 's recommendations , but distanced himself from the " firewall " comments .

Harper also wrote an editorial in late 2000 arguing that Alberta and the rest of Canada were " embark [ing] on divergent and potentially hostile paths to defining their country " . He said that Alberta had chosen the " best of Canada 's heritage ? a combination of American enterprise and individualism with the British traditions of order and co @-@ operation " while Canada " appears content to become a second @-@ tier socialistic country [...] led by a second @-@ world strongman appropriately suited for the task " . He also called for a " stronger and much more autonomous Alberta " , while rejecting calls for separatism . In the 2001 Alberta provincial election , Harper led the NCC in a " Vote Anything but Liberal " campaign . Some articles from this period described him as a possible successor to Klein .

Harper and the NCC endorsed a private school tax credit proposed by Ontario 's Progressive Conservative government in 2001 , arguing that it would " save about \$ 7 @,@ 000 for each student who does not attend a union @-@ run public school " . Education Minister Janet Ecker criticized this , saying that her government 's intent was not to save money at the expense of public education .

Day 's leadership of the Canadian Alliance became increasingly troubled throughout the summer of 2001 , as several party MPs called for his resignation . In June , the National Post newspaper reported that former Reform MP Ian McClelland was organizing a possible leadership challenge on Harper 's behalf . Harper announced his resignation from the NCC presidency in August , 2001 , to prepare a campaign .

= = Canadian Alliance leadership , 2002 ? 03 = =

Stockwell Day called a new Canadian Alliance leadership race for 2002 , and soon declared himself a candidate . Harper emerged as Day 's main rival , and declared his own candidacy on December 3 , 2001 . He eventually won the support of at least 28 Alliance MPs , including Scott Reid , James Rajotte and Keith Martin . During the campaign , Harper reprised his earlier warnings against an alliance with Quebec nationalists , and called for his party to become the federalist option in Quebec . He argued that " the French language is not imperilled in Quebec " , and opposed " special status " for the province in the Canadian Constitution accordingly . He also endorsed greater provincial autonomy on Medicare , and said that he would not co -@-@ operate with the Progressive Conservatives as long as they were led by Joe Clark . On social issues , Harper argued for " parental rights " to use corporal punishment against their children and supported raising the age of sexual consent . He described his potential support base as " similar to what George Bush tapped " .

The tone of the leadership contest turned hostile in February , 2002 . Harper described Day 's governance of the party as " amateurish " , while his campaign team argued that Day was attempting to win re @-@ election by building a narrow support base among different groups in the religious right . The Day campaign accused Harper of " attacking ethnic and religious minorities " . In early March , the two candidates had an especially fractious debate on CBC Newsworld . The leadership vote was held on March 20 , 2002 . Harper was elected on the first ballot with 55 % support , against 37 % for Day . Two other candidates split the remainder .

After winning the party leadership , Harper announced his intention to run for parliament in a by @-@ election in Calgary Southwest , recently vacated by Preston Manning . Ezra Levant had been chosen as the riding 's Alliance candidate and declared that he would not stand aside for Harper ; he later reconsidered . The Liberals did not field a candidate , following a parliamentary tradition of allowing opposition leaders to enter the House of Commons unopposed . The Progressive Conservative candidate , Jim Prentice , also chose to withdraw . Harper was elected without difficulty over New Democrat Bill Phipps , a former United Church of Canada moderator . Harper told a reporter during the campaign that he " despise [d] " Phipps , and declined to debate him .

Harper officially became Leader of the Opposition in May , 2002 . Later in the same month , he said that the Atlantic Provinces were trapped in " a culture of defeat " which had to be overcome , the result of policies designed by Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments . Many Atlantic politicians condemned the remark as patronizing and insensitive . The Legislature of Nova Scotia unanimously approved a motion condemning Harper 's comments , which were also criticized by Premier of New Brunswick Bernard Lord , federal Progressive Conservative leader Joe Clark and others . Harper refused to apologize , and said that much of Canada was trapped by the same " can 't @-@ do " attitude .

In March , 2003 , their speeches in favour gaining no traction in parliament , Harper and Stockwell Day co @-@ wrote a letter to The Wall Street Journal in which they condemned the Canadian government 's unwillingness to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq .

= = Conservative Party leadership , 2004 ? 06 = =

On January 12 , 2004 , Harper announced his resignation as Leader of the Opposition , to run for the leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada . Harper was elected the first leader of the Conservative Party , with a first ballot majority against Belinda Stronach and Tony Clement on March 20 , 2004 . Harper 's victory included strong showings in Ontario , Quebec , and Atlantic Canada .

= = = 2004 federal election = = =

Harper led the Conservatives into the 2004 federal election . Initially , new Prime Minister Paul

Martin held a large lead in polls , but this eroded because of infighting , Adscam (a scandal that came as a result of a Government of Canada " sponsorship program " in the province of Quebec and involving the Liberal Party of Canada) and other scandals surrounding his government . The Liberals attempted to counter this with an early election call , as this would give the Conservatives less time to consolidate their merger .

Martin 's weak performance in the leader 's debate , along with an unpopular provincial budget by Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty in Ontario , moved the Conservatives into a lead for a time . However , comments by Conservative MPs , leaked press releases slandering the then prime minister , as well as controversial TV attack ads suggesting that the Conservatives would make Canada more like the United States , caused Harper 's party to lose some momentum .

Harper made an effort to appeal to voters in Quebec , a province where the Reform / Alliance side of the merged party had not done well . He was featured in several of the Tories ' French @-@ language campaign ads .

The Liberals were re @-@ elected to power with a minority government , with the Conservatives coming in second place . The Conservatives managed to make inroads into the Liberals ' Ontario stronghold , primarily in the province 's socially conservative central region . However , they were shut out of Quebec , marking the first time that a centre @-@ right party did not win any seats in that province . Harper , after some personal deliberation , decided to stay on as the party leader . Many credited him with bringing the Progressive Conservative Party and Canadian Alliance together in a short time to fight a close election .

= = = = Agreement with the BQ and the NDP = = = =

Two months after the federal election , Stephen Harper privately met Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe and New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton in a Montreal hotel . On September 9 , 2004 , the three signed a letter addressed to then @-@ Governor General Adrienne Clarkson , stating ,

We respectfully point out that the opposition parties , who together constitute a majority in the House , have been in close consultation . We believe that , should a request for dissolution arise this should give you cause , as constitutional practice has determined , to consult the opposition leaders and consider all of your options before exercising your constitutional authority .

On the same day the letter was written , the three party leaders held a joint press conference at which they expressed their intent to co @-@ operate on changing parliamentary rules , and to request that the Governor General consult with them before deciding to call an election . At the news conference , Harper said " It is the Parliament that 's supposed to run the country , not just the largest party and the single leader of that party . That 's a criticism I 've had and that we 've had and that most Canadians have had for a long , long time now so this is an opportunity to start to change that . " However , at the time , Harper and the two other opposition leaders denied trying to form a coalition government . Harper said , " This is not a coalition , but this is a co @-@ operative effort . "

One month later , on October 4 , Mike Duffy , who was later appointed as a Conservative senator by Harper , said " It is possible that you could change prime minister without having an election " , and that some Conservatives wanted Harper to temporarily become prime minister without holding an election . The next day Layton walked out on talks with Harper and Duceppe , accusing them of trying to replace Paul Martin with Harper as prime minister . Both Bloc and Conservative officials denied Layton 's accusations .

On March 26 , 2011 , Duceppe stated that Harper had tried to form a coalition government with the Bloc and NDP in response to Harper 's allegations that the Liberals may form a coalition with the Bloc and the NDP .

= = = Leader of the Opposition = = =

The Conservative Party 's first policy convention was held from March 17 ? 19 , 2005 , in Montreal . Harper had been rumoured to be shifting his ideology closer to that of a Blue Tory , and many

thought he 'd wanted to move the party 's policies closer to the centre . Any opposition to abortion or bilingualism was dropped from the Conservative platform . Harper received an 84 % endorsement from delegates in the leadership review .

Despite the party 's move to the centre , the party began a concerted drive against same @-@ sex marriage . Harper was criticized by a group of law professors for arguing that the government could override the provincial court rulings on same @-@ sex marriage without using the " notwithstanding clause " , a provision of Canada 's Charter of Rights and Freedoms . He also argued , in general , for lower taxes , an elected Senate , a tougher stance on crime , and closer relations with the United States .

Following the April 2005 release of Jean Brault 's damaging testimony at the Gomery Commission , implicating the Liberals in the scandal , opinion polls placed the Conservatives ahead of Liberals . The Conservatives had earlier abstained from the vote on the 2005 budget to avoid forcing an election . With the collapse in Liberal support and a controversial NDP amendment to the budget , the party exerted significant pressure on Harper to bring down the government . In May , Harper announced that the government had lost the " moral authority to govern " . Shortly thereafter , the Conservatives and Bloc Québécois united to defeat the government on a vote that some considered to be either a confidence motion or else a motion requiring an immediate test of the confidence of the House . The Martin government did not accept this interpretation and argued that vote had been on a procedural motion , although they also indicated that they would bring forward their revised budget for a confidence vote the following week . Ultimately , the effort to bring down the Government failed following the decision of Conservative MP Belinda Stronach to cross the floor to the Liberal Party . The vote on the NDP amendment to the budget tied , and with the Speaker of the House voting to continue debate , the Liberals stayed in power . At the time , some considered the matter to be a constitutional crisis .

Harper was also criticized for supporting his caucus colleague MP Gurmant Grewal . Grewal had produced tapes of conversations with Tim Murphy , Paul Martin 's chief of staff , in which Grewal claimed he had been offered a cabinet position in exchange for his defection .

The Liberals ' support dropped after the first report from the Gomery Commission was issued . On November 24 , 2005 , Harper introduced a motion of non @-@ confidence on the Liberal government , telling the House of Commons " that this government has lost the confidence of the House of Commons and needs to be removed . " As the Liberals had lost NDP support in the house by refusing to accept an NDP plan to prevent health care privatization , the no @-@ confidence motion was passed by a vote of 171 ? 133 . It was the first time that a Canadian government had been toppled by a straight motion of non @-@ confidence proposed by the opposition . As a result , parliament was dissolved and a general election was scheduled for January 23 , 2006 .

On February 27 , 2008 , allegations surfaced that two Conservative Party officials offered terminally ill , Independent MP Chuck Cadman a million @-@ dollar life insurance policy in exchange for his vote to bring down the Liberal government in a May , 2005 , budget vote . If the story had been proved true , the actions may have been grounds for charges as a criminal offence since , under the Criminal Code of Canada , it is illegal to bribe an MP .

When asked by Vancouver journalist Tom Zytaruk about the alleged life insurance offer then @-@ opposition leader Stephen Harper states on an audio tape " I don 't know the details . I know there were discussions " and goes on to say " The offer to Chuck was that it was only to replace financial considerations he might lose due to an election " . Harper also stated that he had told the Conservative party representatives that they were unlikely to succeed . " I told them they were wasting their time . I said Chuck had made up his mind . " In February , 2008 , the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) investigated the allegations that Section 119 's provisions on bribery and corruption in the Criminal Code had been violated . The RCMP concluded their investigation stating that there was no evidence for pressing charges .

Harper denied any wrongdoing and subsequently filed a civil libel suit against the Liberal Party . Because libel laws do not apply to statements made in the House of Commons , the basis of the lawsuit was that statements made by Liberal party members outside the House and in articles which appeared on the Liberal party web site made accusations that Harper had committed a criminal act .

The audio expert hired by Harper to prove that the tape containing the evidence was doctored reported that the latter part of the tape was recorded over , but the tape was unaltered where Harper 's voice said " I don 't know the details , I know that , um , there were discussions , um , but this is not for publication ? " and goes on to say he " didn 't know the details " when asked if he knew anything about the alleged offer to Cadman .

= = = 2006 federal election = = =

The Conservatives began the campaign period with a policy @-@ per @-@ day strategy , contrary to the Liberal plan of holding off major announcements until after the Christmas holidays , so Harper dominated media coverage for the first weeks of the election . Though his party showed only modest movement in the polls , Harper 's personal numbers , which had always significantly trailed those of his party , began to rise . In response , the Liberals launched negative ads targeting Harper , similar to their attacks in the 2004 election . However , their tactics were not sufficient to erode the Conservative 's advantage , although they did manage to close what had been a ten @-@ point advantage in public opinion . As Harper 's personal numbers rose , polls found he was now considered not only more trustworthy , but a better choice for prime minister than Martin .

Immediately prior to the Christmas break , in a faxed letter to NDP candidate Judy Wasylycia @-@ Leis , the Commissioner of the RCMP , Giuliano Zaccardelli announced the RCMP had opened a criminal investigation into her complaint that it appeared Liberal Finance Minister Ralph Goodale 's office had leaked information leading to insider trading before making an important announcement on the taxation of income trusts . On December 27 , 2005 , the RCMP confirmed that information in a press release . At the conclusion of the investigation , Serge Nadeau , a top Finance Department civil servant , was charged with criminal breach of trust . No charges were laid against then Finance Minister Ralph Goodale .

The election gave Harper 's Conservatives the largest number of seats in the House , although not enough for a majority government , and shortly after midnight on January 24 , Martin conceded defeat . Later that day , Martin informed Governor General Michaëlle Jean that he would resign as prime minister , and at 6 : 45 p.m. Jean asked Harper to form a government . Harper was sworn in as Canada 's 22nd prime minister on February 6 , 2006 .

In his first address to parliament as head of government , Harper opened by paying tribute to the Queen of Canada , Elizabeth II , and her " lifelong dedication to duty and self @-@ sacrifice . " He also said before the Canada @-@ UK Chamber of Commerce that Canada and the United Kingdom were joined by " the golden circle of the Crown , which links us all together with the majestic past that takes us back to the Tudors , the Plantagenets , the Magna Carta , habeas corpus , petition of rights , and English common law . " Journalist Graham Fraser said in the Toronto Star that Harper 's speech was " one of the most monarchist speeches a Canadian prime minister has given since John Diefenbaker . " An analysis by Michael D. Behiels suggests a political realignment may be underway based on the continuance of Harper 's government .

After the election , the Conservative party were charged with improper election spending , in a case that became known as the In and Out scandal . It dragged on for years , but in 2012 they took a plea deal , admitting both improper spending and falsifying records to hide it .

= = Prime Minister (2006 ? 15) = =

= = = 2008 federal election = = =

On October 14 , 2008 , after a 5 @-@ week @-@ long campaign , the Conservative Party won a federal election and increased its number of seats in parliament to 143 , up from 127 at the dissolution of the previous parliament ; however , the actual popular vote among Canadians dropped slightly by 167 @,@ 494 votes . As a result of the lowest voter turnout in Canadian

electoral history , this represented only 22 % of eligible Canadian voters , the lowest level of support of any winning party in Canadian history . Meanwhile , the number of opposition Liberal MPs fell from 95 to 77 seats . 155 MPs are required to form a majority government in Canada 's 308 @-@ seat parliament .

= = = 2008 parliamentary dispute and prorogation = = =

On December 4 , 2008 , Harper asked Governor General Michaëlle Jean to prorogue parliament to avoid a vote of confidence scheduled for the following Monday , becoming the first Canadian prime minister to do so . The request was granted by Jean , and the prorogation lasted until January 26 , 2009 . The opposition coalition dissolved shortly after , with the Conservatives winning a Liberal supported confidence vote on January 29 , 2009 .

= = = 2010 prorogation = = =

On December 30 , 2009 , Harper announced that he would request the governor general to prorogue parliament again , effective immediately on December 30 , 2009 , during the 2010 Winter Olympics and lasting until March 3 , 2010 . Harper stated that this was necessary for Canada 's economic plan . Jean granted the request . In an interview with CBC News , Prince Edward Island Liberal Member of Parliament Wayne Easter accused the Prime Minister of " shutting democracy down " . Tom Flanagan , Harper 's University of Calgary mentor and former chief of staff , also questioned Harper 's reasoning for prorogation , stating that " I think the government 's talking points haven 't been entirely credible " and that the government 's explanation of proroguing was " skirting the real issue ? which is the harm the opposition parties are trying to do to the Canadian Forces " regarding the Canadian Afghan detainee issue . Small demonstrations took place on January 23 in 64 Canadian cities and towns and five cities in other countries . A Facebook protest group attracted over 20 @,@ 000 members .

A poll released by Angus Reid on January 7 , found that 53 % of respondents were opposed to the prorogation , while 19 % supported it . 38 % believed Harper used the prorogation to curtail the Afghan detainee inquiry , while 23 % agreed with Harper 's explanation that the prorogation was necessary economically .

= = = 2010 Senate appointments = = =

Harper , on January 29 , 2010 , advised the Governor General to appoint new Conservative senators to fill five vacancies in the Senate , one each for Quebec , Newfoundland and Labrador , and New Brunswick , and two for Ontario . The new senators were Pierre @-@ Hugues Boisvenu , of Quebec ; Bob Runciman , of Ontario ; Vim Kochhar , of Ontario ; Elizabeth Marshall of Newfoundland and Labrador ; and Rose @-@ May Poirier , of New Brunswick . This changed the party standings in the Senate , which had previously been dominated by Liberals , to 51 Conservatives , 49 Liberals , and five others .

= = = 2011 vote of non @-@ confidence = = =

Harper 's Cabinet was defeated in a no @-@ confidence vote on March 25 , 2011 , after being found in contempt of parliament . Harper thus , in accordance with constitutional convention , advised the Governor General to call a general election . This was the first occurrence in Commonwealth history of a government in the Westminster parliamentary tradition losing the confidence of the House of Commons on the grounds of contempt of parliament . The no @-@ confidence motion was carried with a vote of 156 in favour of the motion and 145 against .

= = = 2011 election = = =

On May 2 , 2011 , after a five @-@ week campaign , Harper led the Conservatives to their third consecutive election victory ? the first time a centre @-@ right party has accomplished this in half a century . The Conservatives increased their standing in parliament to 166 , up from 143 at the dissolution of the previous parliament . This resulted in the first centre @-@ right majority government since the Progressive Conservatives won what would be their last majority in 1988 . The Conservatives also received a greater number of total votes than in 2008 .

The election ended five years of minority governments , made the New Democratic Party the Official Opposition for the first time , relegated the Liberals to third place for the first time , brought Canada 's first Green Party Member of Parliament , and reduced the Bloc Québécois from 47 to 4 seats .

After the election , the Conservatives were accused of cheating in the Robocall scandal , mainly suppressing votes by directing voters to bogus polling stations . There were complaints in 247 of Canada 's 308 ridings , but only one person was charged ; Conservative staffer Michael Sona was convicted and jailed .

= = = 2015 election = = =

Under the Canada Elections Act , a general election had to take place no later than October 19 , 2015 . On August 2 , at Harper 's request , Governor General David Johnson dropped the writs of election for October 19 . In that election , Harper 's Conservative Party was defeated by Justin Trudeau 's Liberals , and became the Official Opposition , having won only 99 out of 338 seats where after the previous election they had 166 of 308 . This was mainly because of a collapse of Conservative support in southern Ontario , a region that swung heavily to them in 2011 . They lost all of their seats in Toronto , and won only three seats in the Greater Toronto Area . They were also shut out of Atlantic Canada ? the first time in decades that there will be no centre @-@ right MPs from that region . Harper was reelected in Calgary Heritage , essentially a reconfigured version of his former riding .

Hours after conceding defeat on election night , Harper resigned as leader of the Conservative Party , though for the time being he will remain in the new parliament as a backbencher . Harper resigned as Prime Minister during a meeting with Governor General David Johnston , who accepted the resignation , after which Johnston invited Trudeau to form a government on November 4 , 2015 .

= = Conservative backbencher and departure from politics = =

Harper returned to Ottawa as a Conservative backbencher and addressed a meeting of the Conservative caucus that included defeated MPs in November . Interim leader Rona Ambrose stated that Harper would be in the House for key votes as the member for Calgary Heritage , but had earned the right to keep a low profile after his service as Prime Minister .

Harper announced in May 2016 that he plans to resign his seat in the House of Commons during the summer before the fall session of parliament . In the same month , Harper delivered a speech to the 2016 Conservative party convention where his accomplishments as party leader and prime minister were honoured by the party .

In December 2015 , Harper had set up Harper & Associates Consulting Inc . , a corporation that lists him a director alongside close associates Ray Novak and Jeremy Hunt .

= = Domestic policy = =

= = = Constitutional issues = = =

After sidestepping the political landmine for most of the first year of his time as prime minister , much as all the post @-@ Charlottetown Accord prime ministers had done , Harper 's hand was

forced to reopen the Quebec sovereignty debate after the opposition Bloc Québécois were to introduce a motion in the House that called for recognition of Quebec as a " nation " . On November 22 , 2006 , Harper introduced his own motion to recognize that " the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada . " Five days later , Harper 's motion passed , with a margin of 266 ? 16 ; all federalist parties , and the Bloc Québécois , supported it .

In 2004 , Harper said " the Upper House remains a dumping ground for the favoured cronies of the prime minister " . Between 2006 and 2008 , by which time Harper was prime minister , he did not put any names to the Governor General for appointment to the Senate , resulting in 16 Senate vacancies by the October 2008 election . The one exception was Michael Fortier . When Harper took office , he directed the Governor General to appoint Michael Fortier to both the Senate and the Cabinet , arguing the government needed representation from the city of Montreal . Although there is a precedent for this action in Canadian history , the appointment led to criticism from opponents who claimed Harper was reneging on his push for an elected Senate . In 2008 , Fortier gave up his Senate seat and sought election as a Member of Parliament (MP) , but was defeated by a large margin by the incumbent Bloc Québécois MP .

After the October , 2008 , election , Harper again named Senate reform as a priority . By December , he recommended the appointment of 18 senators and , in 2009 , provided an additional nine people for appointment as senators . Many of those appointed had close ties with the Conservative Party , including the campaign manager of the Conservative Party , Doug Finley . Critics accused Harper of hypocrisy (the Liberals coined the term " Harpocrisy ") . Conservative Senator Bert Brown defended Harper 's appointments and said " the only way [the Senate] ' s ever been filled is by having people that are loyal to the prime minister who 's appointing them . "

== Economic management ==

By January , 2010 , the federal deficit had risen to \$ 36 billion . It is claimed by certain pundits that the Conservatives raised Canada 's deficit to the largest in the country 's history . At the same time , Canada had the lowest debt @-@ to @-@ GDP ratio in the G7 economies . The Economist magazine stated that Canada had come out the recession stronger than any other rich country in the G7 . In 2013 , Canada came out with Global Markets Action Plan to generate employment opportunities for Canadians .

== 2011 Census ==

Ahead of the Canada 2011 Census , the government announced that the long @-@ form questionnaire (which collects detailed demographic information) will no longer be mandatory . According to Minister of Industry Tony Clement , the change was made because of privacy @-@ related complaints and after consulting with Statistics Canada . However , Canada 's privacy commissioner reported only receiving three complaints between 1995 and 2010 , according to a report in the Toronto Sun .

Munir Sheikh , Canada 's Chief Statistician appointed on Harper 's advice , resigned on July 21 , 2010 , in protest of the government 's change in policy . Ivan Fellegi , the former Chief Statistician of Canada , criticized the government 's decision , saying that those who are most vulnerable (such as the poor , new immigrants , and aboriginals) are least likely to respond to a voluntary form , which weakens information about their demographic .

The move was opposed by some governmental and non @-@ governmental organizations . Federation of Canadian Municipalities ; City of Toronto ; Canadian Jewish Congress ; Evangelical Fellowship of Canada ; Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops ; Canadian Medical Association ; Statistical Society of Canada ; the American Statistical Association ; and Registered Nurses Association of Ontario all opposed the change . However , the Fraser Institute supported the change . The provincial governments of Ontario , Quebec , New Brunswick , Prince Edward Island , and Manitoba , also opposed the change .

== Veterans ==

Under Stephen Harper , the annual budget of Veterans Affairs Canada increased from \$ 2 @. @ 85 billion in 2005 ? 2006 to \$ 3 @. @ 55 billion in 2014 ? 2015 , while the quantity of veterans served has declined from 219 @, @ 152 in 2008 ? 2009 to 199 @, @ 154 in 2015 . Since 2006 , Veterans Affairs Canada returned \$ 1 @. @ 13 billion in unspent funding back to the federal treasury . Nine Veterans Affairs offices were closed between 2012 and 2015 , and 900 positions were phased out from the department since 2009 . Former Minister of Veterans Affairs Erin O 'Toole stated that the closures were made to modernize Veterans Affairs , by moving services online and to Service Canada locations .

In 2006 , Harper implemented the New Veterans Charter passed with all party support by the previous Liberal government . This charter turned the previous lifetime veteran pension system into one of lump sum payments . Under Harper , the Canadian government spent \$ 700 , 000 fighting a class @-@ action lawsuit brought by a group of wounded Afghan veterans who argued that the new Charter was discriminatory . In the statement of defence filed by the federal lawyers , they argued that the government has no obligation and no " social contract " with veterans .

== Foreign policy ==

During his term , Harper has dealt with many foreign policy issues relating to the United States , War on Terror , Arab @-@ Israeli conflict , free trade , China and Africa .

He has reduced defence spending to 1 % of Canadian GDP .

In 2009 , Harper visited China . During the visit Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao publicly scolded Harper for not visiting earlier , pointing out that " this is the first meeting between the Chinese premier and a Canadian prime minister in almost five years " ; Harper in response said that , " it 's almost been five years since we had yourself or President Hu in our country . " In 2008 , former prime minister Jean Chrétien had criticized Harper for missing opening ceremonies for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing ; in response , Dimitri Soudas , a spokesperson for Harper , called the remarks hypocritical , pointing out that Chrétien " attended one of six Olympic opening ceremonies during his 13 years as prime minister .

On September 11 , 2007 , Harper visited Australia and addressed its parliament .

On January 20 , 2014 , Harper addressed the Israeli Knesset in Givat Ram , Jerusalem .

During mid @-@ 2015 , Harper repeatedly voiced his opinion that Russia should be excluded from association with the G7 group of nations because of Russia 's support for Russian @-@ speaking Ukrainian dissidents . On June 8 , Harper said , " Mr. Putin . . . has no place at the [G7] table , and I don 't believe there 's any leader who would defend Mr.Putin having a place . " .

Michael Ignatieff criticized Harper for cutting foreign aid to Africa by \$ 700 million , falling short of the UN Millennium Development Goals , and cutting eight African countries from the list of priority aid recipients .

== Afghanistan ==

On March 11 and 12 , 2006 , Harper made a surprise trip to Afghanistan , where Canadian Forces personnel had been deployed as part of the NATO @-@ led International Security Assistance Force since late 2001 , to visit troops in theatre as a show of support for their efforts , and as a demonstration of the government 's commitment to reconstruction and stability in the region . Harper 's choice of a first foreign visit was closely guarded from the press until his arrival in Afghanistan (citing security concerns) , and is seen as marking a significant change in relationship between the government and the military . Harper returned to Afghanistan on May 22 , 2007 , in a surprise two @-@ day visit which included visiting Canadian troops at the forward operating base at Ma 'Sum Ghar , located 25 kilometres (16 mi) south of Kandahar , making Harper the first prime minister to have visited the front lines of a combat operation .

= = = Israeli and Jewish affairs = = =

Harper has shown admiration for the State of Israel since the early 1990s . Friends and colleagues describe his views as being the product of thinking and reading deeply about the Middle East . " Toronto Rabbi Philip Scheim , who accompanied Harper to Israel " in 2014 said , " I sense that [Harper] sees Israel as a manifestation of justice and a righting of historical wrongs , especially in light of the Holocaust . "

At the outset of the 2006 Israel ? Lebanon conflict , Harper defended Israel 's " right to defend itself " and described its military campaign in Lebanon as a " measured " response , arguing that Hezbollah 's release of kidnapped Israel Defense Force (IDF) soldiers would be the key to ending the conflict . Speaking of the situation in both Lebanon and Gaza on July 18 , Harper said he wanted " not just a ceasefire , but a resolution " but such a thing would not happen until Hezbollah and Hamas recognize Israel 's right to exist . Harper blamed Hezbollah for all the civilian deaths . He asserted that Hezbollah 's objective is to destroy Israel through violence .

The media noted that Harper did not allow reporters opportunities to ask him questions on his position . Some Canadians , including many Arab and Lebanese Canadians , criticized Harper 's description of Israel 's response .

In December , 2008 , the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations recognized Harper 's support for Israel with its inaugural International Leadership Award , pointing out Harper 's decision to boycott the Durban II anti @-@ racism conference , and his government 's " support for Israel and [its] efforts at the U.N. against incitement and ... the delegitimization [of Israel] " .

In March , 2009 , Harper spoke at a Parliament Hill ceremony organized by Chabad @-@ Lubavitch to honour the Jewish victims of the 2008 Mumbai attacks , which included an attack on the Nariman House . He expressed condolences over the murder at Chabad 's Mumbai centre of Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka . Harper described the killings as " affronts to the values that unite all civilized people " . Harper added that the quick instalment of a new rabbi at the Chabad centre in Mumbai as a signal that the Jewish people will " never bow to violence and hatred " .

In 2010 , Canada lost a bid for a seat on the UN Security Council . While initially blaming the loss on his rival Ignatieff , Harper later said that it was due to his pro @-@ Israeli stance . Harper then said that he would take a pro @-@ Israeli stance , no matter what the political cost to Canada . Ignatieff criticized Harper 's stance as a " mistake " , saying Canada would be better able to defend Israel through the Security Council than from the sidelines and pointed out that it is the Security Council that will determine if sanctions are imposed on Iran . Ignatieff also accused Harper of steering the discussion away from implementing the two @-@ state solution , and instead rendering all discussion into a competition " about who is Israel 's best friend " .

= = = Free trade with EFTA = = =

On June 7 , 2007 , the Conservative government announced it had finalized free trade negotiations with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) . Under this agreement , Canada increased its trade ties with Iceland , Norway , Switzerland and Liechtenstein . In 2006 , the value of trade between these partners was \$ 10 @.@ 7 billion . Canada had originally begun negotiations with the EFTA on October 9 , 1998 , but talks broke down because of a disagreement over subsidies to shipyards in Atlantic Canada .

= = = United States = = =

Shortly after being congratulated by George W. Bush for his victory , Harper rebuked US Ambassador David Wilkins for criticizing the Conservatives ' plans to assert Canada 's sovereignty over the Arctic Ocean waters with armed forces . Harper 's first meeting as prime minister with the US president occurred at the end of March , 2006 .

The government received American news coverage during the Democratic Party 's 2008

presidential primaries after the details of a conversation between Barack Obama 's economic advisor Austan Goolsbee , and Canadian diplomat Georges Rioux were revealed . Reportedly Goolsbee was reassuring the Canadians that Obama 's comments on potentially renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) were more political rhetoric than actual policy . The accuracy of these reports has been debated by both the Obama campaign and the Canadian Government . The news came at a key time nearing the Ohio and Texas primaries , where perceptions among Democratic voters was (and is) that the benefits of the NAFTA agreement are dubious . Thus the appearance that Obama was not being completely forthright was attacked by his opponent Hillary Clinton .

ABC News reported that Harper 's chief of staff , Ian Brodie was responsible for the details reaching the hands of the media . Harper has denied that Brodie was responsible for the leak , and launched an investigation to find the source . The Opposition , as well as Democratic strategist Bob Shrum , criticized the Government on the issue , stating they were trying to help the Republicans by helping Hillary Clinton win the Democratic nomination instead of Obama . They also alleged the leak would hurt relations with the United States if Obama ever were to become President . Obama was elected President in November . In February , Obama made his first foreign visit , as president , to Ottawa , in which he affirmed support for free trade with Canada , as well as complimenting Canada on its involvement in Afghanistan .

= = Environmental policy = =

Since Harper 's government took office in 2006 , Canadian greenhouse gas emissions fell from 749 to 726 Mt of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂ eq) . From 1993 until 2006 , during the previous Liberal government greenhouse gas emissions increased from 600 to 749 Mt of CO₂ eq . The reduction corresponded Canada 's decreased economic output during the Great Recession and emissions began increasing slightly in 2010 , when the economy began recovering . Other significant factors in Canada 's decreased emissions during Prime Minister Harper 's time in office are initiatives such as the carbon tax in British Columbia , the cap and trade system in Quebec , Ontario 's coal @-@ fired power plants , and the Clean Air Regulatory Agenda which regulates emissions for automobiles and light trucks . In 2006 , Canada 's Clean Air and Climate Change Act was introduced to address air pollution as well as greenhouse gas emissions ; it never became law . In 2006 , the Clean Air Regulatory Agenda (CARA) was established to " support Government of Canada efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) and air pollutant emissions in order to improve the environment and health of Canadians " . In December , 2011 , the Harper administration announced that Canada would formally withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol . Then Environment Minister Peter Kent stated , " It 's now clear that Kyoto is not the path forward for a global solution to climate change . In December , 2012 , Canada became the first signatory to formally withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol . /

= = Renewable energy = =

Other federal initiatives include the 2011 loan guarantee towards the Lower Churchill Project in Labrador , which is scheduled for completion in 2017 . The Lower Churchill 's two hydroelectric installations at Gull Island and Muskrat Falls will have a combined capacity of over 3 @, @ 074 MW and have the ability to provide 16 @.@ 7 TW · h of electricity per year , which is enough to " reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to taking 3 @.@ 2 million vehicles off the road each year " .

= = Public transit = =

In 2006 , Harper administration invested over \$ 5 billion towards towards public transit projects in Canada . In 2006 , the federal government provided \$ 697 million towards the York @-@ University @-@ Spadina Subway Extension . In September 2013 , former finance minister Jim Flaherty invested a federal contribution of \$ 660 million towards the Scarborough Subway Extension .

= = Supreme Court appointments = =

Harper chose the following jurists to be appointed as justices of the Supreme Court of Canada by the governor general :

Marshall Rothstein (March 1 , 2006 ? August 31 , 2015)

Thomas Cromwell (September 5 , 2008 ? present)

Andromache Karakatsanis (2011 ? present)

Michael J. Moldaver (2011 ? present)

Richard Wagner (2012 ? present)

Clément Gascon (2014 ? present)

Russell Brown (2015 ? present)

= = = Marshall Rothstein = = =

In keeping with Harper 's election promise to change the appointment process , Rothstein 's appointment involved a review by a parliamentary committee , following his nomination by the prime minister . Rothstein had already been short @-@ listed , with two other candidates , by a committee convened by Paul Martin 's previous Liberal government , and he was Harper 's choice . Harper then had Rothstein appear before an ' ad hoc ' , non @-@ partisan committee of 12 members of parliament . This committee was not empowered to block the appointment , though , as had been called for by some members of Harper 's Conservative Party .

= = = Thomas Cromwell = = =

On September 5 , 2008 , Harper nominated Thomas Cromwell of Nova Scotia Court of Appeal to fill the Supreme Court seat left vacant by the departure of Michel Bastarache . By and large Cromwell 's nomination was well received , with many lauding the selection ; however , dissent has been noted surrounding the nomination . First , Harper bypassed parliament 's supreme court selection panel , which was supposed to produce a list of three candidates for him to choose from . Second , Newfoundland justice minister Jerome Kennedy criticized the appointment , citing the Newfoundland government 's belief that constitutional convention stipulates that a Newfoundlander should have been named to the court in the rotation of Atlantic Canadian supreme court representation .

= = = Marc Nadon = = =

On October 3 , 2013 , Harper announced the nomination of supernumerary Federal Court of Appeals Marc Nadon to the supreme court to replace the retiring Morris Fish . The appointment was challenged by both Ontario lawyer Rocco Galati and the provincial government of Quebec as being contrary to the appointment criteria of section 6 of the Supreme Court Act . In response , Harper referred the criteria issue to the supreme court , as well as the question of whether the government 's amendments to the criteria were constitutional . The supreme court subsequently ruled in Reference re Supreme Court Act , ss . 5 and 6 that the Nadon appointment was invalid , and that the federal government could not unilaterally amend the Supreme Court Act . Harper subsequently nominated Clement Gascon to the position instead .

= = Honours = =

Harper received the Woodrow Wilson Award on October 6 , 2006 , for his public service in Calgary . The awards ceremony was held at the Telus Convention Centre in Calgary , the same place where he made his victory speech .

Time magazine also named him as Canada 's Newsmaker of the Year in 2006 . Stephen Handelman wrote " that the prime minister who was once dismissed as a doctrinaire backroom

tactician with no experience in government has emerged as a warrior in power " .

On June 27 , 2008 , Harper was awarded the Presidential Gold Medallion for Humanitarianism by B'nai B'rith International . He is the first Canadian to be awarded this medal .

On July 11 , 2011 , Harper was honoured by Alberta 's Blood tribe . He was made honorary chief of the Kainai Nation during a ceremony , in which they recognized him for making an official apology on behalf of the Government of Canada for the residential schools abuse . Harper issued this apology in 2008 . The chief of the tribe explained that he believes the apology officially started the healing and rebuilding of relations between the federal and native councils . Lester B. Pearson , John Diefenbaker , and Jean Chrétien are the only other prime ministers of Canada to have been awarded the same honorary title .

On September 27 , 2012 , Harper received the World Statesman of the Year award . This award was offered through a US group of various faith representatives . This occurred at a black tie banquet in New York . Jean Chrétien was one of the previous recipients from Canada .

= = = Honorary degrees = = =

Tel Aviv University in Ramat Aviv , Tel Aviv , Israel , 2014 (Ph.D.)

= = Personal life = =

Harper married Laureen Teskey on December 11 , 1993 . Laureen was formerly married to New Zealander Neil Fenton from 1985 to 1988 . The Harpers have two children : Benjamin and Rachel . Harper is the third prime minister , after Pierre Trudeau and John Turner , to send his children to Rockcliffe Park Public School , in Ottawa . He is a member of the evangelical Christian and Missionary Alliance and attends church at the East Gate Alliance Church in Ottawa . According to party literature , he is learning Spanish .

An avid follower of ice hockey , he has been a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs since his childhood in the Leaside and Etobicoke communities in Toronto . He published a book , A Great Game : The Forgotten Leafs and the Rise of Professional Hockey (2013) , which chronicles the growth of professional hockey , particularly in Toronto , and writes articles occasionally on the subject . Harper appeared on The Sports Network (TSN) during the broadcast of the Canada ? Russia final of the 2007 World Junior Ice Hockey Championships . He was interviewed and expressed his views on the state of hockey , and his preference for an overtime period in lieu of a shoot @-@ out . In February , 2010 , Harper interviewed former National Hockey League greats Wayne Gretzky and Gordie Howe for a Saskatoon Kinsmen Club charity event .

Harper taped a cameo appearance in an episode of the television show Corner Gas which aired March 12 , 2007 . He reportedly owns a large vinyl record collection and is a fan of The Beatles and AC / DC . In October , 2009 , he joined Yo @-@ Yo Ma on stage in a National Arts Centre gala and performed " With a Little Help from My Friends " . He was also accompanied by Herringbone , an Ottawa band with whom he regularly practises . He received a standing ovation after providing the piano accompaniment and lead vocals for the song .

In October , 2010 , Harper taped a cameo appearance in an episode of the television show Murdoch Mysteries , which aired July 20 , 2011 , during the show 's fourth season .

Harper is 6 feet 2 inches (188 cm) tall . He was the first prime minister to employ a personal stylist , Michelle Muntean , whose duties range from coordinating his clothing to preparing his hair and makeup for speeches and television appearances . While she used to be on the public payroll , she has been paid for by the Conservative Party since " some time [in] 2007 " .

The Harper family has two cats , Stanley and Gypsy. and they have fostered other cats as well . Since Harper is no longer prime minister , the family moved back to Calgary , Alberta and he will commute to his seat in parliament .

= = Electoral record = =

All electoral information is taken from Elections Canada . Italicized expenditures refer to submitted totals , and are presented when the final reviewed totals are not available .