

Why I am a Conservative

By Senator Mike Duffy, Cavendish PEI

I'm proud to be a Conservative.

As the Prime Minister said at the Conservative policy convention last November: "The Conservative Party is Canada's party."

Stephen Harper got it exactly right. The Conservatives are the party of Confederation, the party that founded Canada at the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences of 1864. Sir John A. Macdonald then put the finishing touches on the constitutional shape of our country at the London Conference of 1866-67, where he was known as "the ruling genius" of the Canadian delegation.

Sir John A., was more than the founding father of our party, he was the founding father of our country. The division of powers between Ottawa and the provinces in Sections 91 and 92 in the British North America Act was his great achievement.

The enduring nature of our federal bargain was determined by his vision for a new country on the northern half of this continent. As linear descendants of Sir John A., Conservative Prime Ministers from Borden to Harper have been proponents of classical federalism, in which Ottawa provides for the national interest but respects the jurisdiction of the provinces, and regards them as partners in Confederation.

Sir John A. Also found a way of accommodating the linguistic and cultural needs of the French-speaking minority within Canada and the English-speaking minority within Quebec. It is another Conservative Prime Minister, Stephen Harper who has reached out to Quebec with the policy of "open federalism," and the parliamentary resolution recognizing the Quebecois nation within a united Canada.

It was Sir Jon A. who created asymmetrical federalism. Many Canadians may have heard this term for the first time with the \$41 billion Health Accord negotiated by

the Liberal government of Mr. Martin in 2004, but it was actually the pragmatic invention of the Conservative Fathers of Confederation.

You see it in Section 93 of the BNA Act allowing religious school boards in Quebec, and in Section 133, making French and English the recognized languages of the courts and legislature of Quebec. That was the creative genius of Sir John A. He found a way to make this country work. He invented the Canadian compromise. He never made the perfect the enemy of the good. His vision was one of "peace, order and good government," and for more than 140 years it has served Canada well. His vision of Canada, as Prime Minister Harper has also said, was a nation of "English and French, East and West."

Even in the decade before Confederation, Sir John A., presided over the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States, the forerunner of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement that would be negotiated more than a century and a quarter later by another Conservative prime minister, Brian Mulroney.

And as early as 1858, a letter crossed Premier Macdonald's desk advocating the building of a railway "through British American territory, to the Pacific." His promise of a railway to the Pacific secured the entry of British Columbia to Confederation in 1870, and the railway itself bound the country together from Atlantic to Pacific.

The railway also led to the settlement of the Canadian West, and its development as the breadbasket of the world. The CPR opened the floodgates of European immigration, bringing thousands of settlers to a new land from motherlands like Ukraine. Their names were Hynatshyn and Romanow, and their descendants became important leaders in our country. The enlightened immigration policies, the multicultural mosaic that is so much a part of today's Canada, began under the Conservative government of Sir John A. Macdonald.

It was a Conservative Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, who led our country through the First World War. In what was then a nation of only nine million people, he raised a standing army of 600,000 men. These chapters of Canadian

valour are inscribed in places such as Vimy Ridge. Canadian sovereignty was born on the battlefields of Europe, at a very heavy price.

And at the conferences that determined the shape of the post-war world, Borden fought and won Canada's own seat at the table. At the Imperial Conference of 1917, he was the author of resolution affirming "the right of the Dominions to have an adequate voice in foreign policy and foreign relations." At the Versailles Conference of 1919, when British Prime Minister Lloyd George objected to Canada speaking with its own voice, Borden replied: "Canada had lost more men killed in France than Portugal had put in the field."

At Borden's insistence, the Treaty of Versailles was also submitted to Parliament for a vote. From then on, Canada spoke with its own voice in the world, thanks to the leadership of a Conservative Prime Minister. Canadian sovereignty began on a Conservative watch.

The Conservatives are the party that under R.B. Bennett enhanced Canada's sovereignty by creating our central bank, the Bank of Canada, at the height of the Great Depression in 1935. Monetary policy is a central feature of national sovereignty, and it was a Conservative initiative.

It was the Conservatives, also under Prime Minister Bennett, who created the national broadcaster, the CBC, with the passage of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act and the establishment of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in 1932. Again, it was a Conservative, Prime Minister Mulroney, who enhanced the role of the CBC in putting Canada's first all-news channel, CBC Newsworld, on the air in 1989.

It was the Conservatives, often portrayed as cultural philistines, who created the Canada Council under Diefenbaker in 1957. And again, it was Prime Minister Mulroney who insisted on an exemption for Canada's cultural industries in the free trade negotiations with the United States.

Our Liberal friends have a habit of suggesting that Liberal values and Canadian values are one and the same. I'll be the first to acknowledge their contribution to this country, but we Conservatives should also be the first to celebrate ours.

From Macdonald to Harper, Conservatives have given Canada 13 of its 22 prime ministers, and have left a legacy of nation-building, from one generation, and one century, to the next.

It was a Conservative Prime Minister, again Sir Robert Borden, who gave women the right to vote in 1919. It was another Conservative Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, who named the first woman cabinet minister in 1957. The first black MP, Lincoln Alexander, was elected under Robert Stanfield's Progressive Conservative banner in 1968, and later became Canada's first black cabinet minister under Prime Minister Clark in 1979. He was later appointed by Prime Minister Mulroney as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, another first for black Canadians.

The Conservatives are the party of the first Chinese Canadian MP, the first Japanese Canadian MP, the first Muslim Canadian MP and the first Hindu Canadian MP.

Yet somehow the Liberals have appropriated for themselves the mantle of the party of Canada's multicultural communities, when both our great national parties have equally distinguished themselves with new Canadians. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the energetic efforts of Jason Kenny, Conservatives are working hard to further broaden their appeal to multicultural communities.

Somehow, the Liberals have also claimed for themselves the role as the party of women when the Conservatives have both a proud legacy, and a strong presence on women's issues. There are 11 women in Mr. Harper's cabinet, a higher percentage of women in cabinet than in the previous Liberal government, indeed one of the highest percentages of women in any cabinet in Canadian history. From one woman under John Diefenbaker, to 11 women under Stephen Harper.

In Mr. Mulroney's time, there was a record number of women appointed as the heads of boards and agencies, as well as to the bench. The present Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Beverley McLachlin, was appointed to the High Court by Mr. Mulroney.

So Conservatives have no lessons to take from Liberals on advancing the cause of multiculturalism, or women's issues, in Canada. It is Conservatives who have blazed a trail, and led the way, on both.

It was also Mr. Diefenbaker who gave Canada's Aboriginal peoples the right to vote in federal elections in 1960. Even before that, Prime Minister Diefenbaker appointed the first Aboriginal member of the Senate, James Gladstone, in 1958. And it is Prime Minister Harper, in the same spirit, who has appointed another Aboriginal leader, Patrick Brazeau, to the Senate.

It was John Diefenbaker who gave us the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960. Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights paved the way for the Charter of Rights, more than twenty years later. His Bill of Rights states simply and profoundly: "I am a Canadian." As Diefenbaker said in the House in debate on the Bill of Rights: "The principles of freedom are never final. Freedom is not static. It either grows or it dies. It grows when the people of a country have it in their hearts, and demand that it be preserved."

It was Diefenbaker who first enunciated a Northern Vision for Canada. His northern motto was simple: "Roads to Resources." If you built them, people would come. It was another Conservative Prime Minister, Mr. Mulroney, who boldly asserted Canada's Arctic sovereignty when he pointed to the Northwest Passage on a globe in the PM's office and famously told his visitor, President Reagan: "Ron, that's ours." And it is another Conservative Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, who has enhanced our Arctic sovereignty, on defence, on the environment, and on resources.

Today's roads to resources in the North are across open water, with the melting of the polar ice cap. The fabled Northwest Passage, which for centuries defied all

attempts of explorers to sail through it, may be open water in another decade, creating a commercial passage from Europe to Asia.

The melting of the ice cap is an environmental challenge, but it's also an incredible economic opportunity, with billion of barrels of proven oil reserves, and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas, below the receding ice levels. Prime Minister Harper is providing strong leadership in Canada's North, the last great frontier on earth. And it all started with Diefenbaker.

It was Diefenbaker's appointment of the Bladen Commission on Canada's Automotive Industry that gave us the recommendations that led to the Auto Pact, which has given Canada 20 percent of the North American auto production, twice the market share of our population. It is the Harper government which has undertaken a multi-billion dollar rescue package to save the Canadian auto industry in the present crisis. To the question of do you want a Canadian auto industry in this country, a Conservative government has answered a resounding Yes.

It was Diefenbaker's appointment of Judge Emmett Hall of Saskatchewan that led to the recommendations that gave us our universal health care system.

And it was a Conservative Prime Minister, Mr. Mulroney, who negotiated the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and, later, the NAFTA, which has resulted in \$2 billion a day of two-way trade, the largest trading relationship in world history. Over the history of the FTA, which celebrates its 20th anniversary of implementation this year, Canada's merchandise exports to the US have more than tripled, from less than \$100 billion to more than \$300 billion.

Every billion dollars of new trade creates 10,000 new jobs. So you can do the math on how beneficial the FTA and NAFTA have been to Canada. Free trade has created millions of jobs for Canadians, and lasting prosperity for Canada. But don't take my word for it: Pierre Pettigrew, when he was Mr. Chretien's Trade Minister in 2000, said that four new Canadian jobs in five were created by exports; and 80 percent of our exports then went to the United States.

It is largely because of personal and corporate tax revenues generated by exports, as well as GST receipts, which enabled Canada to balance its books, ending twenty-five years of deficit spending, in 1997. While the Mulroney GST was never a popular tax—and I never met one that was—it has proven a highly efficient one. So much so that Prime Minister Harper was able to keep an important campaign commitment in reducing the GST from 7 percent, to 6 percent to 5 percent—and to do so in a year and a half rather than within five years as promised.

All the while, the Conservatives have paid down another \$40 billion on the national debt, giving Canada the fiscal margin it needs to address the current economic crisis with a stimulative budget. The Finance Minister, Jim Flaherty, has pledged a return to surpluses within several years, and he means it. Under the Conservatives, deficits will never again become a permanent feature of our affairs.

The Conservative party has a proud history, and a rich legacy of achievement, from Confederation to the present day. There is also a legacy of nation-building, which began with Confederation, and continues every day.

It has been reflected by successive Conservative leaders, and their vision of Canada. Every Conservative Prime Minister, from Macdonald to Harper, has begun from an idea of Canada, the nature of our people, and our place in the world. It's their leadership that has defined our party and our country.

And it all comes from the people. There is a famous poster of Sir John A. from his last campaign in 1891. His campaign slogan was "The old flag, the old party, the old leader." And Sir John was being carried on the shoulders of the people.

It is the people of Canada who have lifted up our leaders. They have all stood on the shoulders of giants, the ordinary people of this party and this country.

We never forget that. It all begins here, with you.