

Martin invokes Harris legacy to blast Tories' plan for Canada [CA] ^[1]

Author: Clark, Campbell & Laghi, Brian

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EXCERPTS

Stephen Harper would move Canada toward a "fend-for-yourself" government reminiscent of former premier Mike Harris' rule in Ontario, Paul Martin charged yesterday.

In an interview with The Globe and Mail, the Liberal Leader described one of Mr. Harper's star candidates, former Harris minister Jim Flaherty, as "Mike Harris-plus."

And Mr. Martin insisted the election will come down to a choice between a Liberal Party that believes in spending on social programs such as subsidized child care, and a Conservative Party that doesn't.

"I'm going to talk about this, his view of government, which is 'fend for yourself,' and my view, which is take the resources of the nation and work together," Mr. Martin said.

"I'm going to be talking about this extensively throughout the campaign, and I'm going to be illustrating, in terms of the kinds of the policies that we would bring in, how that difference exists."

He compared Mr. Harper's style with that of Mr. Harris, suggesting the Tory Leader would cut taxes and social programs at the same time. It is an attitude that starts at the top and permeates the Conservative Party, including the prominent candidates who would likely be chosen for a Harper cabinet, he said.

"I don't know who he'd put in his cabinet, but you take Jim Flaherty. I mean, Jim Flaherty is Mike Harris-plus," Mr. Martin said. "There's no doubt that Stephen Harper is leaning to Mike Harris, and obviously, Jim Flaherty is going to be part of that."

"I think that what the Harris government did in terms of cutting taxes and jeopardizing social programs and actually jeopardizing the balance sheet of Ontario was wrong. I think that Flaherty would reinforce that part of Stephen Harper."

Mr. Flaherty, the candidate for the riding of Whitby-Oshawa, served as attorney-general, finance minister and deputy premier in Mr. Harris's Tory administration. Mr. Flaherty raised a stir when he ran for the provincial leadership by supporting a ban on teachers' strikes and suggesting the homeless should be put in shelters, hospitals, rehab centres and jails.

Mr. Martin cited the daycare issues as the best example of the philosophical differences between his party and Mr. Harper's. The Liberal idea for child care is to funnel money to the provinces, which are then obliged to spend it on creating daycare spaces. The Conservatives are promising to give all Canadians with preschool children \$100 a month to spend as they see fit.

Mr. Martin said it is fine to give parents a break, but it can't be called a daycare program. He noted that his government has already signed daycare agreements with 10 provinces. "Stephen Harper has said he will rip that agreement up and that he doesn't believe that government has any role to play in child care," he said. "I don't think you could get a more graphic difference between us."

Mr. Martin's focus on child care comes as the polling gap between his party and the Tories begins to close.

He said that the first half of the campaign allowed him to talk about his government's record, and that this week he will begin unveiling new policies.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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