

A Canada for my 'constituency' [CA] ^[1]

Our nation's true wealth lies in its children

Author: Cavoukian, Raffi

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EXCERPTS

Two weeks ago it was reported that Paul Martin, Stephen Harper and Jack Layton all named me as their favourite children's entertainer. After a feel-good moment, I wondered what I might say to these gentlemen on behalf of the most loveable group in the country, our very young, my "constituency" for almost 30 years.

The Canada I want is one that honours its children and respects them as essential members of our communities.

At a critical time in the history of life on our planet, doing right by our children is not a political game, it's a long-term process of building a strong and sustainable culture. Our young need us to work together (whatever our politics) to create a hospitable world fit for children; they are entitled to nothing less.

Addressing young children's irreducible needs should be a national priority, supported by all political parties.

To build social capacity, to promote social justice, to advance cultural diversity, to save vast amounts in socio-economic costs, to restore ecosystems and to foster genuine prosperity, we must focus on the needs of the very young. In short, our democracy can be judged by how we regard and treat our children.

With this in mind, children need us to cast our vote for:

- universal early child care and development in enriched settings;
- neighbourhood family-resource centres;
- a ban on corporal punishment;
- universal, publicly funded health care and delivery;
- clean air initiatives, alternative energy subsidies, the Kyoto agreement, elimination of toxins that most impact our youngest;
- affordable housing;
- toxic-free, nutritious food;
- a quality of life index that measures what matters most;
- economic initiatives that lift families out of poverty.

We know that the most important time in a human life is the formative first years; research confirms that early experience shapes lifelong behaviours. As a society, we haven't quite grasped this reality. Once we do, how will we act on this knowledge? How can our society most effectively respect its Most Valuable Players?

Ask your local candidates what they think a child-honouring society would look like. Make a note of their answers and consider which candidates are most likely to work toward such a goal in Parliament.

Tomorrow's voters are counting on us. As we vote in this election, we should look to a future in which every family contributes its full potential to our country's prosperity. The soul of a nation is shaped by the experience of its youngest citizens.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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