

Harper changing way we talk, think about Canada ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The federal Conservatives are proving every day they don't need a majority to transform Canada.

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On the domestic front, that same social conservative base and the Conservatives' determination to return Canadian federalism to the 1867 British North America Act era are combining to shred what little progress this country has made in creating a pan-Canadian social and educational policy framework.

Since 2006, the Conservatives have either axed or slashed funding for the Canadian Council on Learning, the Status of Women, the Canadian Council of Social Development, the Court Challenges Program, the Canadian Policy Research Networks, the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Volunteer Canada, the Canadian Health Network, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, Family Service Canada and Centres of Excellence, among many others.

The gutting of the Canadian Council on Learning, which was leading the push for national standards for post-secondary education, comes at a time when the Obama administration is launching a massive \$250 million education initiative, claiming education is key to America's future prosperity. But the council was never popular with the provincial-rights premiers and it is an affront to the Harper government's belief that all social policy is provincial, if not family-based.

Don Giesbrecht, president of the Canadian Child Care Federation, can speak firsthand about how the Harper government's social conservatism and provincial rights beliefs feed upon each other, especially its antipathy to child care.

"To have a conversation with this current government about children and child care just doesn't happen," says Giesbrecht, who is executive director of the Assiniboine Children's Centre. "To me, it's quite overt, (child care) is provincial responsibility, the federal government has no role, it's a 'wash our hands of it' kind of conversation....(Human Resources Minister) Diane Finlay's first comments to us as a group were: 'I'll be damned if anybody ever tells me how to raise a child'."

He sums up the government's sweeping defunding of federal social agencies this way: "Let's face it, no marriage ever dissolves, there's no such thing as a single parent, every husband earns six figures."

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