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Harper Senate Reform undermines Democracy and National Unity: former Tory Cabinet Minister and PC Party Leader, Sinclair Stevens states.

SATURDAY, 09 FEBRUARY 2013 19:06

For Immediate Release February 5, 2013.

Newmarket, Ont. - The Hon. Sinclair Stevens, Leader of the Progressive Canadian Party, today stated his serious concern that the Harper government's appointments and proposals for Senate Reform again undermine democracy in Canada and Canadian national unity.

The Harper government claims a strong mandate but it is based on the support of only 39% of Canadians in the 2011 election.

"Harper's appointments are mere patronage and partisanship, showing no interest in democracy and threatening national unity," Stevens said. "His appointees pledge to vote as he wishes rather than, as Senators, to determine what is best for Canada." Stevens added, "Harper's Senate Reform proposals threaten Canadian unity by making Senators militant advocates of each province's interest against all the others and against Canada, making Canada and parliament answer to Senators elected by the provinces and appointed by himself as prime minister. Yet his constitutional reference is trying to deny the provinces their constitutional right to object to his proposal for firewall federalism. He is trying to see how far he can go because the constitution doesn't interest him. Democracy doesn't interest him. That's why he prorogues parliament and uses omnibus bills to treat the Opposition in the Commons as irrelevant rather than as the voice of Canadians who are their constituents."

January 25th Prime Minister Stephen Harper again appointed new Senators who pledge to support his government's Senate Reform plans, including limiting Senate appointments to terms of nine years, depriving Parliament of its institutional memory, and to create a framework for the provinces to hold elections with no constitutional standing to select Senate nominees. He poses abolition as an alternative. A constitutional reference is now intended.

Under Canada's constitution senators serve to review and revise government legislation and regulatory proposals with powers equal to the Commons in fulfilment of Senate responsibility as a revising chamber balancing Commons rep by pop with regional representation in four equal defined Senate Divisions. The Senate is not a house of the provinces nor of elected party or provincial partisanship. The Senate's role is as the institutional memory of parliament and nonpartisan revising chamber of "sober second thought."

Constitutional reform of the Senate under the general formula requires the agreement of seven provinces representing fifty percent (50%) of the population of Canada.

Yet all of these Canadian constitutional principles seem to be violated by the Harper appointments and legislative proposals. Prime Minister Harper's Senate appointments also violate the Guiding Principles for Senate Reform established and reaffirmed by the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, two of them developed in Western Canada.

The Guiding Principles for Senate Reform require any such proposal to meet three historic constitutionally-based standards.

First, acknowledgement that the important work the Senate does in Committee to examine proposed legislation or regulation provides the opportunity for long-term study of complex issues free of the inherent instability resulting from partisan politics in the Commons and electoral politics (Guiding Principle 235).

Second, the Senate is a check on the power of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Government. In fact, the Senate protects our parliamentary democracy against excessive partisanship by the Prime Minister, political movements and the party in power. This role was understood by Sir George Etienne Cartier who worried that democracy might be reduced to a populist mob and abused by a demagogue serving as prime minister (Guiding Principle 236).

Third, the first duty of Canada's Senators is to Canada, not to their party, province, region or interest and belief. The Senate is a revising chamber, necessarily nonpartisan as the chamber of "sober second thought" at the centre of the Canadian federal principle (Guiding Principle 237).

The Senate is Parliament's institutional memory, with powers equal to the Commons but reluctant to use them because they are appointed, not elected, yet serving as a safeguard against partisan self-interest of the party or prime minister in office and as a key defence of national unity within the Canadian federal principle.

But Stephen Harper abuses these principles, reminding us of his disregard for constitutional necessity and for Tory principle.

Referring to firewall federalism as classical federalism, Mr. Harper's public statements on Senate Reform seek to replace Canada's principle of co-operative federalism between the provinces and between the provinces and Canada itself. This would be the effect of provincially elected Senators.

Ironically such new Senators, if they were to be elected in provincial elections, would violate the intention of Canada Elections Act, Section 550, which prohibits candidates for election from pledges in writing to sell their vote or vote in ways conditional to their election because doing so is to buy office and to violate the integrity of parliament. In spirit if



not in law Harper exacting promises of support for his policies from his senate appointees calls into question their credibility as a check on the prime minister and as a revising chamber capable of sober second thought concerning government legislation and regulation.

Progressive Conservative Senator Elaine McCoy who has described Canada's appointed Senate as the last defence of democracy in today's hyper-partisan political atmosphere in the Commons has proposed a blue ribbon panel to nominate Governor General appointments to the Senate instead of by the prime minister alone or provincial elections.

The Progressive Canadian Party, representing Progressive Conservative political philosophy and policy directions and guided by the Tory Guiding Principles for Senate Reform, applauds Senator McCoy's recommendations and notes further that the Queen's Privy Council already exists as a nonpartisan body to fulfil the constitutional requirements of Senate appointments and Senate Reform.

Aquorum of the Queen's Privy Council across party lines and levels of government, comprising former Governors General, present and former prime ministers and cabinet ministers, Supreme Court Chief Justices, inducted Leaders of the opposition and premiers, could fulfil its historic role as an advisory body to the Crown by recommending to the Governor General persons qualified to serve in Canada's Senate in fulfilment of its duty as a revising chamber of "sober second thought."

The Progressive Canadian Party looks forward to the opinion to be provided in the Supreme Court reference.

For more information on the Issue raised contact:

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APPENDIX: References:

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Last Updated on Tuesday, 12 February 2013 13:29

WHAT PREVENTS CANADIANS FROM BEING MORE INNOVATIVE AND WEALTHY?

TUESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2013 09:13

"Creativity lies at the heart of modern competitiveness. Innovation is the ability to create new products and services, to produce existing products in new ways, and to develop new markets. It drives productivity; it drives growth; and it drives our living standards. The problem is that Canada is not an innovation leader".

The above quote is from Kevin Lynch's article in The Globe and Mail entitled, **Canada has everything going for it- except innovation.** Canada's attitude toward itself has been called many things, a colonial mentality, a weak sister mentality, and a branch plant mentality, but no matter what term you use to describe Canada, they all refer to the fact that Canada is content just to sit back and do things they way that things have always been done, with attention to innovation or change being minimal to the point of being non-existent. I am referring, of course to the attitude in which the governments, both past and present have not introduced any real creativity in terms of how we can be in the forefront of innovation, and therefore competitiveness.

It is time Canada and our provinces had their own state oil company! Canada's Nexen Inc., available at \$15.1 Billion would have been a good initial investment for such a new Canadian Provincial, (Can-Pro) company to join the world's other state owned oil and gas companies which have a combined \$3 Trillion in assets. Unfortunately, the Chinese got there first and now they are the proud owner of oil and gas assets which at today's prices would be worth \$300 Billion alone over the next thirty years. The Chinese government only paid \$15.1 Billion for this piece of Canada!

The B.C. publication The Tyee states, "Norway produces 40 percent less petroleum than Canada and

has one-seventh of our population, but has saved more than \$600 Billion in oil and gas revenue and counting. This is equivalent to about 40 percent of Norwegian GDP or about \$120,000 for every man, woman and child in the country. In contrast, every Canadian is in the red about \$16,000, due to our \$566 Billion national debt. "While Canada is eliminating 19,000 public sector jobs in an effort to balance the budget, Norway is debt free, enjoys full employment, and has the fourth largest per capita GDP in the world, Canada is twelfth".

There are no bad companies, only bad management

Why is it that our students are so far in debt that many drop out because of the overwhelming financial burden? According to the Canadian Federation of Students, the total student debt is a whopping \$15 Billion and counting. If this country thought of our students as a natural resource asset instead of penalizing them, we could make better use of our budget dollars to invest in our own country. If only a fraction of the lop-sided \$35 Billion defense money allotted for the F-35's were transferred to wipe out the present student debt then we could enjoy a more innovative system that would allow students free post-secondary education, treated like grades 13 through 17, making sure that we continue a responsible legacy to the next generation instead of a restrictive, inherited debt load.

Innovation not imitation

Innovative management policy would also make sure that we see beyond what is only immediate, looking forward to a more creative and promising future in trade, ensuring a healthy and vibrant economy. Canada is a member of the 54 nation Royal Commonwealth of Nations, and in that Commonwealth are some 2 Billion people, as opposed to just over 300 Million the U.S. There is a huge potential in Commonwealth trade that could be actively pursued, instead of plodding along with our present dependency on the U.S.

With innovative, visionary thinking, instead of the old reactionary style, Canadians could be world leaders in so many areas. Instead of an archaic system that promotes inequality, especially for our top 1%, which is threatened by the prospect of change, we could be enjoying a clear and vibrant future through innovation, and affordable education for our youth.

Last Updated on Tuesday, 22 January 2013 10:11

Canada's 1% Inequality - What Steps Should We Take?

WEDNESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2012 09:45

According to a report entitled, "The Rise in Canada's Richest 1%", by Armine Alnizyan, written for The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, "Canada's richest are taking over more gains from economic growth than ever before in recorded history". Among those 1%, 246,000 privileged few took almost 32% of all growth in incomes between 1997 and 2007. Armine Alnizyan goes on to say, "That's a bigger piece of the action than any other generation of rich Canadians has taken".

"Income trends over the past 90 years reveal that incomes are as concentrated in the hands of the richest 1% as they were in the roaring twenties, but even then, those elite few didn't experience as rapid a growth in their income share as has occurred in the past twenty years", she says.

Clearly there has never been a more widespread or heartfelt discrepancy - so what is the cause?

The report states that historically Canada's elite few relied not on earned income but on returns on investments in stocks and bonds, and rent from their real estate properties. The richest 1% are now paid very large sums, on top of which there are bonuses, stock options, and other forms of compensation, making them more and more exclusive from those who comprised the have-nots.

There is a saying that goes, "There is such thing as a bad company, just bad management". Growing inequality exemplifies this saying, and further highlights the one deadly sin that can bring everything down - greed. Greed is mindless, and serves only the one, or the ones who

Eliminating Post-Secondary Student Debt: The Intelligent Choice

TUESDAY, 09 OCTOBER 2012 09:13

Last Updated on Tuesday, 09 October 2012 10:07

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are part of a like minded group of self serving and self centred individuals who have helped create the current world wide economic chaos.

Irresponsibility goes hand in hand with greed, because, when the whole economic scandal became public, and while people all over the world are still reeling from the shock waves, the refrain from the ones at the top says, "Well, no one told us we couldn't"!

Fortunately in Canada, we have better banking regulatory systems in place that help us avoid the liar loan based, housing bubble fiasco in the U.S., but that's no reason to be complacent. It is a reason to institute some transparent accountability so that we are not susceptible to what seems to be the modern legacy of the 21st century - crisis management

Last Updated on Tuesday, 12 February 2013 13:31

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