

Tory MP John Herron set to jump to Liberals

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OTTAWA (CP) - Tory MP John Herron may announce Friday that he'll seek the Liberal nomination in his New Brunswick riding, following ongoing discussions with the Prime Minister's Office.

Herron has refused to join the new Conservative Party of Canada, which was born out of a merger of the former Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties, and had indicated he would likely not run in the next federal election. But he said Thursday he believes his ideas for revamping post-secondary education have found a receptive audience in Prime Minister Paul Martin.

"My motivation for re-engaging is because I think this is going to be an activist government," Herron told The Canadian Press.

"And if I have a chance to have the prime minister's ear on access and excellence in post-secondary education, if I can help steward and improve their lot in a tangible way, that's a responsibility I'm going to have to consider pretty seriously."

Martin praised Herron as a "very important" MP with a great "depth of knowledge" on education issues.

"He would certainly be an asset as a member of Parliament to any political party," Martin said when asked about Herron following a cabinet meeting.

Conservatives were not so kind.

Fellow New Brunswick MP Elsie Wayne, deputy leader of the new Conservative party, played down Herron's looming defection.

"It doesn't surprise me . . . As far as I'm concerned, he loses his credibility when he crosses that floor and I think he'll find the people in his riding feel the same way.

"It doesn't mean a thing to us at all. If that's what he wants to do he can go do it. He's the one who pays the price, not us."

Herron said he would sit as an Independent Progressive Conservative until the next election - expected this spring - rather than jump ship immediately, unlike Nova Scotian Scott Brison who crossed the floor from the Tories to the Liberals last month.

Herron is the father of two children under age four and has been in the House of Commons representing Fundy-Royal since 1997.

"The attraction of private life was getting immensely larger," he said.

"But in more recent weeks I've had a chance to talk to the Prime Minister's Office and there's a large weight on my shoulders where I feel if I have a chance to work with an activist government . . . That alone is reason to engage."

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