

MacKay reveals deal that made him party leader



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Peter MacKay is attempting to quiet the criticism that has so far plagued his short-lived tenure as leader of the federal Progressive Conservative Party, as he goes public with the controversial deal that made his win possible.

Since agreeing to the backroom deal with leading rival David Orchard that secured his fourth ballot win, MacKay has triggered a firestorm of criticism, both from within and outside his party ranks.

But after reading the one-page, handwritten agreement, MacKay said Wednesday: "Everyone in the caucus is 100 per cent comfortable" with the deal.

Among the conditions he and Orchard agreed to:

- no merger or joint candidates with the Canadian Alliance
- review of the FTA/NAFTA by a blue ribbon commission
- commitment to making environmental protection "front and centre" in party policy
- "clean up of head office," including hiring some of Orchard's "people" before the next election

The final point, about replacing the party's national director and installing some Orchard supporters in head office, was a point not revealed earlier.

Indeed, national director David Scrymgeour resigned Saturday night after MacKay signed the deal. And Elsie Wayne announced she's been formally asked to step down as deputy party leader, after almost 10 years. Quebec MP Andre Bachand replaces Wayne.

MacKay says the personnel changes would have happened anyway.

"We've had some problems at head office in terms of communication and there were natural changes that were going to take place. So this is not a concession," he said.

After seeing the handwritten agreement for the first time Wednesday morning, Tory MPs said they were in a forgiving mood.

"I'm satisfied. I'm comfortable with it. There's no surprises," MP Bill Casey told reporters outside the caucus meeting.

Scott Brison, a leadership candidate who threw his support behind second-place Jim Prentice during Saturday's voting, said the caucus meeting was "very constructive and satisfying."

Later, MacKay told reporters why he decided to make the deal public.

"We put it down in writing so there is no misinterpretation of it. And now you see it and there is no hidden agendas or a secret deal and it is out and public," MacKay said.

He added that he never intended the "gentlemen's agreement" to take on such significance.

"What happened was Mr. Orchard jotted the things down as we discussed them, " MacKay explained. "I made the other amendments and he said, 'Well, let's sign it and date it,' and that is it." The deal was sealed on a handshake, MacKay said.

The explanation wasn't good enough for Canadian Alliance leader Stephen Harper, who said secret deals should not drive MacKay's policy decisions.

"I will hope that at some point Mr. Mackay and I will be able to discuss that and he and I will share a vision for the country. It'll

be a very different vision than Mr. Orchard."

NDP Leader Jack Layton agreed the backroom deal will just further foster public cynicism toward elected officials.

"Signing away the principles that you stand for? I mean no one in the NDP is going to sign an agreement to give up on public medicare, for example, in order to win a leadership contest," Layton told reporters. "This is the new Peter principle."

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