

PC deputy leader to gays: 'Shut up'

Gay Tory Brison outraged: 'Why are they in parades ... dressed up as women on floats?'

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National

SOUND OFF!
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS STORY?



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OTTAWA - Elsie Wayne, the deputy leader of the Progressive Conservatives, said yesterday that homosexuals should "shut up" about their lifestyle and complained that Canadians should not have to tolerate gay pride parades, drag queens and same-sex marriages.

(Please note, this Sound Off is now closed due to overwhelming response. We thank you for your comments. Please feel free to peruse all of the many ones we have received however, we are not accepting any new comments.)

The remarks prompted outrage from Scott Brison, a gay Tory MP and party leadership candidate. Mr. Brison said Mrs. Wayne's comments smacked of bigotry and demanded she be stripped of her job as deputy leader.

The controversy erupted during a speech that Mrs. Wayne, the MP for Saint John, gave on same-sex marriage in the Commons.

"When it comes to people who wish to live together, whether they are women or men, why do they have to be out here in the public always debating that they want to call it marriage? Why are they in parades? Why are they dressed up as women on floats?" Mrs. Wayne said.

"They do not see us [heterosexuals] getting up on the floats, for heaven's sake, to say we are husband and wife. We do not do that. Why do they have to go around trying to get a whole lot of publicity? If they are going to live together, they can go live together and shut up about it. There is not any need for this nonsense whatsoever and we should not have to tolerate it in Canada."

Mr. Brison, who is in a long-term relationship but spoke publicly about his sexual orientation only this year, said he is appalled.

"I think most Canadians feel we should not have to tolerate bigotry in Canada. Elsie's statements are an embarrassment to the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada and an embarrassment to the Parliament of Canada," he said. "She should not be deputy leader of our party. She has brought great shame to the party."

Mrs. Wayne's remarks drew a rebuke but no formal punishment from Joe Clark, the Tory leader, who has been a strong supporter of gay rights and has appeared as marshal in a Calgary gay parade. Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE) also condemned the comments and asked that Mrs. Wayne apologize.

But Mrs. Wayne said in a subsequent interview that she stood by her comments, describing the homosexual lifestyle as "unfortunate" and "not natural." Mrs. Wayne said she finds gay pride parades "ridiculous."

"It is just to get attention. Instead of getting attention, it is better for them to live their lifestyle quietly," she told the National Post.

Asked for her personal views on the homosexual lifestyle, Mrs. Wayne said: "What do I think of it? Well, I think it is very unfortunate. It really is.... I think most people feel it is not natural, that's for sure."

Mr. Clark, who has won accolades from the gay community for his support of equal rights for homosexuals, said Mrs. Wayne does not speak for the Tory party.



CREDIT: Fred Chartrand, The Canadian Press

When a Cabinet minister made fun of her sweater, above, Elsie Wayne made "it into a national tragedy," fellow Tory MP Scott Brison said yesterday.

"Elsie has extreme views on that issue," said Mr. Clark, who several years ago joined a gay pride parade in his Calgary Centre riding. "She does not speak for me. She doesn't speak for the party. She is free to express her views."

But Mrs. Wayne's remarks could ignite a feud in the Tories' leadership race. Mrs. Wayne is a strong supporter of Peter MacKay, the front-runner in the leadership election, to be held on May 31.

Mr. Brison called on Mr. MacKay to denounce Mrs. Wayne's statements.

"I would hope that Peter MacKay condemns strongly this sort of rabid prejudice from somebody who is part of his campaign," Mr. Brison said. "There will be no room for that kind of prejudice in the new PC party I am building."

Mr. MacKay's campaign could not be reached for comment.

Mrs. Wayne said she and Mr. Brison "get along extremely well" because his sexual orientation is not an issue in his politics. "Scottie knows how we feel, and the majority of our people. We don't condemn Scott. None of us have," Mrs. Wayne said.

"That is his way of life, and that's it. He doesn't ask for any special privileges."

Mr. Brison noted yesterday that Mrs. Wayne cried foul when John McCallum, the Defence Minister, made a joke in the House about the colourful sweaters she wears. "What is really ironic is when someone in the House of Commons makes a comment about Elsie Wayne's sweaters she makes it into a national tragedy, and here she is making the most personal comments about people."

Mr. Brison said he believes churches should be able to sanction same-sex marriages if they choose, and that the federal government's involvement in the issue should be limited to recognizing "domestic registered partnerships" for gay or heterosexual couples.

John Fisher, director of advocacy for EGALE, called Mrs. Wayne's comments disturbing and said Mr. Clark should dissociate his party from the MP.

"It is sad.... It is disturbing that in this day and age, we still have parliamentarians believing that it is OK to discriminate against certain groups of Canadians," Mr. Fisher said. "I think Ms. Wayne's comments are unfortunate.... We'd like to see her apologize."

He added that Mrs. Wayne "is out of touch with the values of mainstream Canada."

Mrs. Wayne made her initial remarks in the Commons during a debate on a Canadian Alliance motion calling on the federal government to fight recent court rulings that the Alliance says threaten the traditional definition of marriage, favour child sexual predators and pornographers. In her speech, Mrs. Wayne said child pornography and same-sex marriages "contradict the society values that we hold dear."

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