



McLellan opens fire at Harper

Conservative leader would isolate Albertans, deputy PM says

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EDMONTON - A government led by Stephen Harper would keep Albertans out of the political mainstream, Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan said Sunday.

With the campaign for the June 28 federal election only minutes old, McLellan launched her party's Edmonton campaign by attacking the Conservative leader for proposing a "firewall" around Alberta to protect it from federal intrusion.

"Do we want to build walls around Alberta?" she asked her cheering throngs at a Liberal campaign kickoff.

"No. We want Albertans to be driving the national agenda."

Her opening shot is an indication the Liberals plan to dredge up statements from Harper's past to use against him.

The firewall strategy comes from a paper Harper and five other political activists wrote in 2001 urging Alberta to withdraw from national programs like medicare and the Canada Pension Plan to press for a better deal in Canada.

While McLellan insisted the Liberal campaign will focus on the positive, she said she believes the Conservative leader has to answer for the paper even though he wasn't an MP when he co-authored it.

"I'm going to be talking about it because Albertans are talking about it," said McLellan, facing a tight race in Edmonton Centre. "They think it is offensive to build a wall around our province. Albertans want to be part of defining this country."

She wasn't the only Liberal to take aim at Harper's past. Veteran MP David Kilgour, seeking re-election in Edmonton-Beaumont, said the Conservative leader can't be trusted on health care.

"We Liberals are the friends of health care," said Kilgour. "We won't allow anyone to restructure it away."

Conservatives said they aren't surprised the campaign became personal so quickly.

"Their campaign strategy from the start has been to demonize Stephen Harper," said Conservative candidate Laurie Hawn, running to unseat McLellan in Edmonton Centre. "That's because they have no platform, no record they want to run on and no credibility. All that leaves



Anne McLellan launches her campaign on Sunday.

CREDIT: John Lucas, The Journal

them with is attacking our leader."

Conservative MP Rahim Jaffer, seeking re-election in Edmonton Strathcona, said government corruption has become the dominating issue because of the sponsorship scandal.

"The question will be -- who do you trust?" he said. "The Liberals will be fighting a negative campaign. I think it will backfire on them."

Former MLA Debby Carlson, running for the Liberals in Edmonton Strathcona, said the sponsorship scandal trails health care as an issue among voters.

But Malcolm Azania, running for the NDP in the same riding, said government ethics and trust are running a close second.

"Eleven years ago, the Liberals won by campaigning against a corrupt (Brian Mulroney) government," he said. "This time, they are the corrupt government."

McLellan said the worst of the sponsorship scandal is over.

"People see that the prime minister has been committed to get to the bottom of this," she said.

In calling the election, Prime Minister Paul Martin said health care will be the main issue. He promised the provinces an additional \$3 billion a year in health-care funding.

McLellan, a former health minister, acknowledged provincial premiers, including Alberta's Ralph Klein, may not be that thankful.

"It has never been my experience that premiers thank the government of Canada," she said. "I don't think that is part of the dynamic they have with the federal government."

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