

Personal Profile of Stephen Harper, Leader of the Opposition

Stephen Harper was elected Leader of the Canadian Alliance on March 20th, 2002. He was elected to the House of Commons, for the second time, as the MP for Calgary Southwest on May 13th and was sworn in as Leader of the Opposition on May 21st.

These achievements represent just the latest events in a political career that began in the mid '80s as a Progressive Conservative parliamentary assistant. Stephen Harper was a founding member of the Reform Party of Canada. He served as the party's first policy chief and was the principal author of Reform's 1988 election campaign platform. He first ran for Parliament as a Reform candidate in 1988, then worked for Deborah Grey when she became the first Reform MP elected to the House of Commons. Mr. Harper was one of the key architects of the Reform Party's 'zero in three' plan to eliminate the federal deficit that was the centrepiece of the party's 1993 campaign platform. In that election, he ran again in Calgary West, and successfully captured the seat.



Stephen Harper impressed many as an effective, energetic MP who served Reform as a leading spokesperson for issues related to finance and national unity. He was instrumental in developing Reform Party policies advocating fiscal responsibility and tax reform that remain the foundation of the Canadian Alliance's approach to these matters today.

As a bilingual MP, Mr. Harper has also done a great deal for the cause of national unity. He was a leading spokesperson for the 'No' campaign against the Charlottetown Accord, a defining time for the Reform Party, as Canadians ultimately rejected the Accord in a nationwide referendum. He was particularly active fighting for a strongly united Canada during the 1995 Quebec Referendum, highlighted by several televised appearances in English and French. He was also a key drafter of the party's approach to national unity following the narrow victory in the 1995 referendum. On the impact of Mr. Harper's work in this area, Toronto Star columnist Chantal Hébert has written, "If one were to trace the federal clarity law on Quebec secession back to its true origins, the exercise would lead straight to Stephen Harper. In the matter of his government's main initiative on the unity front, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien is merely a foster parent to Harper's love child..."

After leaving Parliament in 1997, Stephen Harper served briefly as vice-president, then became president of the National Citizens Coalition. The NCC is a conservative advocacy group, committed to the defence of our basic political and economic freedoms. In his time as president between 1998 and 2001, Mr. Harper challenged the federal wheat board monopoly, was successful in bringing down oppressive gag laws, and worked to promote free and open markets, individual freedom and responsibility under limited government, and a strong national defence.

Born in Toronto in 1959, Stephen Harper was raised and educated through elementary and high school in Leaside and Etobicoke. He moved to Alberta to work in the energy industry in 1978. Mr. Harper received his Economics undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Calgary, where he also taught as a sessional lecturer.

Stephen Harper and his wife Laureen have two young children.