

Charles Joseph Clark

Canada's sixteenth prime minister

Quick Facts

Term(s) of Office:

- June 4, 1979–March 3, 1980

Born

- June 5, 1939, High River, Alberta

Education

- University of Alberta, B.A. 1960, M.A. Political Science 1973

Personal Life

- Married 1973, Maureen McTeer (b. 1952)
- One daughter

Occupations

- 1966–1967 Director of Organization, Alberta Progressive Conservative Party
- 1967 Special Assistant, Davie Fulton, M.P.
- 1967–1970 Executive Assistant, Robert Stanfield, M.P.
- 1993–1998 Professor, Consultant
- Author

Political Party

- Progressive Conservative
- 1976–1983 Party Leader
- 1998–2003 Party Leader

Constituencies

- 1972–1979 Rocky Mountain, Alberta
- 1979–1993 Yellowhead, Alberta
- 2000 Kings-Hants, Nova Scotia
- 2000–2004 Calgary Centre, Alberta

Other Ministries

- 1984–1991 Secretary of State for External Affairs
- 1991–1993 President of the Privy Council and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs

Political Record

- Leader of the Opposition 1976–1979, 1980–1983
- Appointed Lincoln Alexander first black Cabinet minister 1979
- Canada's embassy in Iran sheltered American embassy staff 1979–1980
- Constitutional Accord (Charlottetown Agreement), while Constitutional Affairs Minister 1992

Biography

We will not take this nation by storm, by stealth or by surprise. We will win it by work.

—Joe Clark, February 1976

Such a modest, straightforward approach is unusual in politics, but entirely characteristic of Joe Clark. Hard work at the grassroots of the Conservative party led him to become its leader and Prime Minister of Canada. Despite a short term in office and dethronement as Conservative leader, Clark continued to serve the party with a career distinguished by sterling efforts behind the scenes. These efforts eventually brought him back to the centre stage of Canadian politics, when he again led the Progressive Conservative party until 2003.

Charles Joseph Clark was born in High River, Alberta in 1939, the son of a newspaper owner and editor. While in high school, he gained journalism experience with the *High River Times* and the *Calgary Albertan*, and joined the staff of the *Gateway*, the University of Alberta's campus newspaper as a freshman, eventually rising to be editor-in-chief there. But politics soon proved to be a greater passion than journalism. At the University of Alberta he studied history, English and political science. Active in student politics, Clark's first taste of professional politics came in 1958 when he worked for Alan Lazerte, who was campaigning for leadership of the Alberta Progressive Conservative party.

After graduating in 1960, he travelled through Europe for a year. In 1962, he worked for Diefenbaker's election campaign. After a year in law school at Dalhousie, Clark transferred to the University of British Columbia, but concluded that law was too dull for him. In between, he continued to write freelance newspaper articles. Clark's political activities carried on; he served as President of the Progressive Conservative Student Federation, as well as working for Davie Fulton in the B.C. election in 1963. The following year, Clark began an M.A. in political science at the University of Alberta, but was soon working for Peter Lougheed, the new provincial leader of the Conservatives. By this time, Clark's election experience was considerable and he was a key organizer in communications as well as contributing significantly to policy and strategy. Clark himself ran in the provincial election in 1967, for Calgary South. Held by the Social Credit Speaker of the legislature, it was a "suicide" seat, but Clark came within 462 votes of winning.

Davie Fulton's federal leadership bid was Clark's next project. Fulton lost, but Clark was invited to work for the winner, Robert Stanfield. By 1971, Clark was back in Alberta trying to finish his M.A. but was again enticed by another political challenge: Conservative candidate for the federal riding of Rocky Mountain. He won the nomination and the Commons seat in 1972.

In 1976, Clark entered the Conservative leadership race and won against political heavyweights such as Claude Wagner and Flora MacDonald. As Opposition leader, he set about reuniting his party, badly split since the Diefenbaker years, and reorganizing its structure. Party fundraising was overhauled and Clark introduced executive caucus meetings to concentrate Conservative attacks on

government policy in the Commons. Like the previous Progressive-Conservative leader, Robert Stanfield, Clark found Trudeau's charismatic image a difficult one to counter. Although adroit at parliamentary debate and a good organizer, Clark was lampooned by the news media as awkward and inept.

Nevertheless, in 1979, the Conservatives won a minority government, and at the age of 39, Clark became Canada's youngest prime minister. After the extravagant public spending of the Liberals, the Conservatives were intent on fiscal restraint and one of their first pieces of legislation was a stringent budget of program cuts and tax increases. The New Democratic party would not support it and Clark's government was defeated, just seven months after they were elected. Clark's prime ministerial legacy was not publicly evident: he reorganized the structure of Cabinet committees and introduced a system of expenditure control that was retained by the returning Liberals. In addition, the Conservative's Access to Information Act, which was drafted but not yet introduced in the Commons, was also adopted by the next government.

The 1980 election returned Clark and his party to the Opposition. His major role here was delaying Trudeau's 1981 constitutional reforms until federal-provincial agreement and judicial review had been reached. In 1983, a leadership review challenged Clark's position. He called for a convention and lost to Brian Mulroney. Despite the bitterness such a situation can create, Clark remained in the party as a member of Parliament and strove to preserve party unity. When the Conservatives returned to power in 1984, Clark served as Secretary of State for External Affairs. In 1991, he took on an even more important ministry of Constitutional Affairs. In the aftermath of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Clark was instrumental in drafting the Charlottetown Accord and gaining its approval from the provincial premiers.

After leaving politics in 1993, he took a teaching position at the University of California, and worked as a consultant. Clark re-entered the political fray in 1998, becoming leader of the Progressive Conservative party, a position he held until May 2003.

International Relations

In the election of 1979, one of the planks in the Progressive Conservative Party platform was to move the Canadian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Once in office, Clark was persuaded that this was not sensible due to Arab opposition, therefore he dropped the idea.

In June 1979, Clark appointed the first woman to serve as secretary of state for external affairs, Flora MacDonald. Later, under Mulroney's government, Clark served as secretary of state for external affairs from 1984 to 1991.

Clark attended the G7 Summit in Tokyo, Japan. The G7 or Group of Seven countries were originally founded to foster economic coordination.



Under Clark's leadership, Canada agreed to accept 50,000 Vietnamese refugees or “boat people” as they were called. The government agreed to sponsor one refugee for each one sponsored privately, a very generous program.

Anecdote

Portrait of a politician as a young man

Joe Clark got a first-hand view of politics in action at a young age. In 1956, when he was in Grade 11, he won a Rotary Club public-speaking scholarship. The prize was a trip to Ottawa. Instead of visiting museums, Joe headed for the House of Commons. Here he met the Conservative leader George Drew and after several hours of waiting, he managed to see Alberta Senator Donald Cameron and John Diefenbaker, MP for Prince Albert, who was soon to become party leader and prime minister.

Sitting in the visitors' gallery in the House of Commons, Joe was witness to the historic Pipeline Debate and the Liberals' invocation of closure to end the clamorous objections of the Opposition. Joe returned home somewhat troubled by this experience. He thought these political events demonstrated that there was no democracy in Canada and he was convinced that government needed a strong, effective Opposition.

Little did he know that he was destined to fulfill that very role under similar circumstances. In 1981, Joe Clark was Opposition leader when the Liberals tried to invoke closure to pass their constitutional reforms. Such was the protest from the Conservatives that passage of the bill was delayed and it was sent to parliamentary committee for review.

Bibliography

Camp, Dalton. *Points of Departure*. Ottawa: Deneau and Greenberg, 1979.

Canada's Prime Ministers, 1867–1994. [Ottawa]: National Archives of Canada, 1994.

Canada's Prime Ministers, 1867–1994: Biographies and Anecdotes. [Ottawa]: National Archives of Canada, [1994].

Clark, Joe. *A Nation Too Good To Lose: Renewing the Purpose of Canada*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1994.

Foreign Affairs and International Trade. “New Guys with New Ideas.” Updated: 2008-11-03. http://www.international.gc.ca/history-histoire/photos/new_guys-nouvelles_tetes.aspx?menu_id=40&menu=R (August 4, 2009)

Granatstein, J.L. and Norman Hillmer. *Prime Ministers: Ranking Canada's Leaders*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 1999.

Humphreys, David L. *Joe Clark: A Portrait*. [Ottawa]: Deneau & Greenberg, 1978.

Nolan, Michael. *Joe Clark: The Emerging Leader*. Don Mills, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1978.

Simpson, Jeffrey. *Discipline of Power: The Conservative Interlude and the Liberal Restoration*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984.

Troyer, Warner. *200 Days: Joe Clark in Power: The Anatomy of the Rise and Fall of the 21st Government*. Toronto: Personal Library Publisher, 1980.

