

Stephen Joseph Harper

Canada's twenty-second prime minister

Quick Facts

Term(s) of Office:

- February 6, 2006– to date

Born

- April 30, 1959, Toronto, Ontario

Education

- University of Calgary, B.A. 1985; M.A. Economics 1991

Personal Life

- Married 1993, Laureen Teskey (b. 1963)
- one son, one daughter

Occupations

- 1978–1981 Worked in oil industry, computer operations and programming (also summers 1982–1984)
- 1985–1986 P.C. Legislative Assistant on Parliament Hill
- 1986–1988 Instructor in Economics, University of Calgary
- 1987–1993 Chief Policy Officer/Senior Policy Officer, Reform Party of Canada
- 1989–1990 Legislative Assistant and Policy Advisor to Reform M.P. Deborah Grey
- 1993–1997 Reform Party Critic for Finance, National Unity and Intergovernmental Affairs
- 1998–2001 President National Citizens Coalition

Political Party

- 1987 Founding member of the Reform Party of Canada
- 2002–2004 Leader of the Canadian Alliance
- Conservative Party of Canada
- 2004– to date, Party Leader

Constituencies

- 1993–1997 Calgary West, Alberta
- 2004– to date, Calgary Southwest, Alberta

Political Record

- Leader of the Canadian Alliance March 20, 2002–January 21, 2004
- Leader of the Opposition May 21, 2002–January 8, 2004; March 20, 2004–February 5, 2006
- Co-founded the Conservative Party of Canada with Peter MacKay 2003

Biography

The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. We are sorry.—Taken from the Statement of Apology delivered by Prime Minister Harper to former students of Indian Residential Schools on June 11, 2008

Stephen Joseph Harper was born April 30, 1959, in Toronto, Ontario. He was the third child of Joseph Harper, an accountant for Imperial Oil, and his wife Margaret (Johnston). In 1978, Stephen Harper moved to Alberta to work in the petroleum industry. He later attended the University of Calgary where he received a BA in economics in 1985 and in 1991 a master's degree.

Also in Calgary, Harper became involved in politics. In 1980, Prime Minister Trudeau had introduced the National Energy Program (NEP). This generated great discontent in Alberta, where oil production had been leading economic growth and job creation. Stephen Harper became a regular at the riding functions of the then Progressive Conservative member of Parliament for Calgary West, Jim Hawkes.

Harper worked for Hawkes as a legislative assistant from 1985 to 1986, in Ottawa. Frustrated by Ottawa politics and by the Progressive Conservative Party itself, he left both and returned to the University of Calgary to work towards his master's degree in economics.

Feeling ideologically alienated from the Progressive Conservatives, Harper met with Preston Manning and others who were thinking of creating a new party. In 1987, the Reform Party of Canada was founded. In 1988, Harper ran unsuccessfully for Parliament as a member of the Reform Party, in Calgary West, against his former boss, Jim Hawkes.

In 1989, Deborah Grey won a by-election and became the first elected member of the Reform Party. Harper returned to Ottawa as her legislative assistant.

In the 1993 election, the Reform Party made a significant breakthrough in Western Canada, winning 52 seats. Harper defeated Jim Hawkes in Calgary West. Harper served as a Reform Party MP for four years. In 1997, he left Parliament to become vice president, then president, of the National Citizens Coalition, but kept active in his political party.

The Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance was created in 2000 from a merger of the Reform Party and other conservative groups. In March 2002, Harper was elected leader of the Canadian Alliance. In May of that year, he was elected member of Parliament for Calgary Southwest.

Harper worked actively for the merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party. This was achieved in December 2003, and in March 2004, Harper was elected leader of the party, which became the Conservative Party of Canada. Harper became Leader of the Opposition.

In the federal election of January 2006, he led his party to victory with a minority government, and on February 6, 2006, Harper was sworn in as prime minister.

Harper's government reduced the Goods and Services Tax from 7% to 6%, and later to 5%. Harper also brought in the Federal Accountability Act, to keep tighter controls on government spending. He increased the Canadian commitment to help resolve the conflict in Afghanistan.

Probably the most moving event of his first term was his apology, on behalf of the Canadian government, to former students of residential schools. This was done at a special ceremony in the House of Commons on June 11, 2008.

In the election of October 14, 2008, the Conservatives increased their number of seats, from 124 to 143, but remained in a minority situation.

International Relations

The Harper government has been very supportive of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. In March 2006, shortly after becoming prime minister, Harper flew to Kandahar to visit the Canadian troops. He has committed Canada to continuing its mission until 2011.

In the summer of 2006, fighting broke out in Lebanon after Hezbollah militants kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. Harper supported the Israelis, describing their actions as a "measured" response. There were about 50,000 Lebanese Canadians, mostly with dual citizenship, living in Lebanon at the time. Because civilians were endangered by the conflict, the Canadian government arranged and paid for many of these people to return to Canada. While travelling on official business, Harper even diverted his plane to pick up some of these people.

To assert Canadian sovereignty in the North, partially in response to some disputes with the Danes, Harper announced a number of plans, including the establishment of a Canadian naval presence in the North and increasing surveillance flights.

Harper has sought good relations with the Americans. He got along quite well with President George W. Bush. In February 2009, Harper welcomed newly elected President Barack Obama for a brief visit to Ottawa.

Anecdote

Stephen Harper – Hockey Fan

Stephen Harper, a member of the Society for International Hockey Research, is currently writing a book on the history of Canadian hockey. His interest in hockey led him to arrange for funding so *Hockey: Canada's Royal Winter Game* could be restored by Library and Archives Canada.

This rare Canadian publication, written in 1899 by hockey player Arthur Farrell, is believed to be the first book ever written about hockey. A digital copy is available on the Library and Archives Canada website.

Bibliography

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