

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 14th, 2:00 pm ET - Comments by Garth Turner, Independent MP for Halton, at National Press Theatre in Ottawa:

Thank you very much for your interest.

There's been speculation that I will announce my intent to join a political party that starts with 'G'. This is not the case today.

I am here to talk about something I consider more substantive since it affects many more people than just one homeless MP.

Sadly I would say the voice of the people is being quelled right now, and I am not going to let that happen without speaking up. I realize full well this probably won't help my situation.

That last time I was here was on the day of my ouster from the Conservative caucus. That event raised a number of questions. These are not just about my situation, but about every MP, every riding association, all parties, the political masters and all Canadians who get involved in the grassroots process.

The people who selected me as the Conservative candidate in Halton, sent 10 questions to the leadership of the Party. Among those questions:

1. What was the reason the MP was booted out and where's the evidence? After all, they selected him and sent him to Ottawa.
2. What is the MP's status as a candidate for next election? The local party people nominated him twice in 18 months, the last time just 8 weeks ago.
3. What happens if the people in the riding nominate him again? Who decides who represents the people - the people, or the party?

Well, now we have some answers.

Three letters were sent to me and my Halton Conservative association simultaneously on Friday afternoon. You will be given copies in a moment.

Here is what the leader of the Conservative Party, its top officials and the National Caucus chair, have determined:

1. I have been disqualified as a party candidate for in the next election. I am a card-carrying member of the party, and yet denied the right to be a candidate.

2. That decision came in a closed meeting by the Party's national executive. No reason given.
3. The national president of the party says I will not be permitted to seek a Conservative nomination again.
4. My suspension from caucus is indefinite, no reason will be given for it. No evidence will be provided to my electors. And I don't know what indefinite means...
5. National caucus chair Rahim Jaffer tells the local riding all of these matters are all internal.

Let me summarize:

- * The party has removed an MP nominated by the local party members and elected by the voters.
- * The party will not explain this to those folks.
- * The candidate they selected for the next election is being set aside. No explanation.
- * All of these actions were taken in secret, without any input or appeal, and yet materially affect the voters of a large electoral district.
- * This raises more questions - about the role average Canadians actually have in the political system, and their ability to choose their own representatives - and about this government's commitment to transparency, openness and accountability in the political system.

Canada's New Government is suddenly looking a lot like the old ones - controlling power in Ottawa while it makes both MPs and the people who sent them here irrelevant.

But it's not just the Conservative Party. Sadly, they all work about the same way.

I am therefore serving notice today of the following actions:

1. I resign my membership in the Conservative name. This is not easy to do after being a Conservative MP twice, a cabinet minister, a national leadership candidate and a Tory my whole life.

But my Conservative party believes in free speech, diversity of opinion, co-operation, equality of all people, progressive social values, true environmental protection and stands firm against intolerance, bigotry exclusion.

More importantly, though, I have realized that party politics - not just this party - is the problem.

2. Second, in the House of Commons I will support the government only when its actions are consistent

with what I have just stated. I may only have one vote, and I may not change a whole lot, but it matters to me. I will try to make that vote count, and you will know it.

3. Third, I will seek out expert legal opinion on how our big national political parties, can be forced to be more democratic - to actually listen to, and obey, members. Right now these parties operate as old boys' clubs accountable only to themselves. Is it any wonder voter turnout is dropping and cynicism is rising?

4. Fourth, I will introduce a private member's bill seeking equal treatment in the House of Commons and under the Canada Elections Act for Independents. They should be able to sit on committees and raise money by issuing tax receipts right along with every other MP.

5. And, fifth, I'm not going away. Over the coming months I will travel anywhere people want to talk about democratic renewal, parliamentary reform, the role of our MPs and how citizens can get involved to reclaim this system from the unrepentant, arrogant party bosses and the unelected backroom boys.

I invite Canadians everywhere to get involved so we can break this tedious cycle of electing politicians who sell us on change and deliver us, same old, same old.

The events of the past few weeks have shown me it is time to remove this filter of parties which comes between people and their Parliament.

What can one person do - an Independent like me?

While in the past 3 weeks, as an Indie, I was able to pose 5 questions in the House of Commons and play a role in bringing income-splitting for 2 million retired Canadians into reality.

That means I have had more influence as an Independent in moving issues ahead than I had in 9 months as a party backbencher.

In addition, every day I talk to tens of thousands of Canadians online and have built a data base of tens of thousands more who feel disaffected from all parties - people who feel they can never have their voice heard through that filter.

This is the future, and I'm committed to making to happens for all Canadians, and not going back to supporting party politics the way it's been - controlling ideas and controlling our Parliament.

So this is not about bashing Stephen Harper or the Conservatives. It's about finding a better way ahead. Maybe we need 5 or 10 or 20 more Independents in the next Parliament - enough to break the Party stronghold and bring about what the people want - free votes, more free thought and a better political



system.

Let's think twice about electing people who promise what they cannot or will not deliver. Let's do better. Let's at least talk about it.

Shortly a new discussion forum will go live, where we can talk about promises we can keep to each other. Please visit it - PromisesKept.ca.

The issue here is democracy. It's about the relevance of the voters. It's about how we are represented, and the way the big and powerful political parties operate. How can voters think they matter when the people they send here don't?

My own experience has proven that not only is dissention unwelcome, but that the party poohbahs of all colours have made themselves more important than millions of voters and tens of thousands volunteers.

If this can happen to one MP, it can happen to any MP.

Seven hundred members of the Conservative Party in Halton nominated a guy as their candidate - twice. And yet a few party officials, accountable to nobody and meeting in secret, deny their actions. How is this democratic?

At the same time, this is the party that took an MP elected by a majority of people as a Liberal in Vancouver, and made him a member of the Conservative government. It makes you wonder. Sure makes me wonder.

The fight here is not to get me back into the caucus. Forget that. It's done.

The true fight is for democratic principle. Either we have a bottom-up system in which people select those we send to Ottawa, or not. The people who citizens decide to send may end up being party cheerleaders and supporters, or they might end up, like me, being a pain in the ass of the leader.

But regardless, the people sent them, and unless that MP ends up voting against a budget or publicly opposing a major policy or calling for the leader to resign, they should serve their term as the people wanted.

These party brass - need to be reminded they are not a quick and dirty substitute for the people. They are

not above the people.

Finally, my situation and the party responses I have received, will never change this reality:

- * Blogging and what it represents in terms of openness in politics is not going away.
- * The genie is out of the bottle and digital democracy is here to stay. Get used to it.
- * Political elites who maintain a fortress mentality and deny the people more involvement, especially using the new technologies, will fail.

This is why I am here this afternoon. I hope it's the sunrise of a new political accountability for all Canadians; not just the sunset on my time in politics.