

Appreciation for Kim Campbell's legacy grows

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Last week Kim Campbell was feted at the dinner of the Parliamentary Internship Program, marking the 20th anniversary of her prime ministership.

So what was her legacy? The most obvious was that she was the first and, so far, only female prime minister of Canada.

When prime minister Kim Campbell called a meeting with all the first ministers in preparation for a G7 meeting in the summer of 1993, the first of its kind, we were beginning to see female first ministers, including P.E.I.'s Catherine Callbeck and Nunavut's Nellie Cournoyea.

And ever since leaving politics in 1993, Campbell has played an active role in Canada and internationally in supporting the need for women to be in politics and to take political leadership. She was a founding member and then secretary general of the Council of Women World Leaders, of which there have been over 40 in recent decades.

She is also a founding member of the Council of Madrid, made up of world leaders, which promotes democracy across the globe. She makes a point of speaking to young women—and men—about the importance of women in politics. Young folks tend to gravitate to her message.

Some of Campbell's most notable work she did was when she was federal minister of justice in the second Mulroney administration including work on issues of human rights, aboriginal justice and gender equality. She is credited with putting forward Bill C-43, a compromise between the strongly-held pro-choice and pro-life views held in the Progressive Conservative caucus. And while her bill on abortion, which had minimal restrictions, was defeated in the Senate, she was also the one to announce that the government would not proceed with any further legislation on abortion, which is still the status of that issue.

Despite some strong opposition from members of her own party she brought in tougher gun control following the 1989 massacre at L'École polytechnique in Montreal, and then took on the issue of sexual assault by reaffirming the rights of the victims. In the end, some of the more right-wing members supported her leadership vote because they felt she had been fair in their dealings, even if they disagreed with some of her views. Balance in social issues was possible in conservative circles back then.

“Doing politics differently” was one of her slogans when she ran for the Progressive Conservative leadership in 1993, and trendy as it was, her interest in including Canadians in the process of law-making was significant. She was big on consultation through her ministerial times and wanted that to be the modus operandi of a Campbell administration. So whether it was consulting with premiers



before a G7, or as a minister with employees of her department or aboriginal leaders, or immigrant women, she started a project by talking to a lot of concerned folks. This, sadly, is part of her legacy that is not a priority with the present government, not by a long shot. But it is a valid and valuable approach and will likely return at some point, whether in the short or longer term.

Campbell reorganized government in ways that still endure as she also reduced the size of Cabinet from 35 to 23. Yes, there are 39 members in Cabinet today, but she helped change the structures of departments. The new Canadian Heritage Department made a strong voice for Canadian cultural policy.

Human Resources Development Canada was formed bringing together the employment issues from the old Employment and Immigration and the welfare aspects from Health and Welfare, thus leaving Health as a ministry unto itself.

She did combine parts of immigration enforcement with the Solicitor General function, but after pushback left the two ministries separated, with the new Citizenship and Immigration. Ironically in the post 9/11 period, the enforcement aspects of immigration is with Public Safety and border control.

The results of the 1993 election are interesting to recall because although the Progressive Conservatives led by Campbell only won two seats, they also won 16 per cent of the popular vote compared to 18 per cent for the Reform Party (with 52 seats), and 14 per cent for the Bloc Québécois (with 54 seats thus becoming Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition). The NDP won seven per cent of the vote and nine seats and the winning Liberals won 41 per cent with 177 seats. The PC votes were just spread out too thinly.

Campbell came at the end of nine years of the PC government, the usual shelf life of any party in government. It was nine years of some big transformational issues; most notably free trade, Meech Lake and the GST, and many Canadians were tired of big national debates. As Brian Mulroney said in a recent interview with Conrad Black on Zoomer TV, part of Jean Chrétien's pitch to Canadians was that he was not Brian Mulroney. In essence, Campbell carried the torch for that.

As one looks back on her short time, there seems to have grown a sense that Canada was still better off for having had Kim Campbell as Prime Minister. The interns' dinner showed a genuine affection and appreciation for her service.

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