

Campbell Takes Office as Canada's First Female Premier

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OTTAWA — Kim Campbell, a 46-year-old lawyer, took office Friday as Canada's first female prime minister in a bold bid by the ruling Conservatives to recover popularity in time to win elections this year.

Campbell, the first Canadian prime minister born after World War II, promised to restore Canadians' faith in government by bringing in a new generation of leaders to deal with severe unemployment and soaring government deficits.

She quickly moved to distance herself from her unpopular predecessor, Brian Mulroney, by slashing the Cabinet size by almost one-third and reshuffling departments to focus on new jobs, public security and maintaining Canada's health service.

"It is crucial to close the distance between Canadians and their government," she said after her swearing-in.

"Canadians want their government to help them, not hinder them, in the process of economic renewal," she told a news conference. "A smaller Cabinet is a more efficient and more effective instrument to discuss, to decide, to lead."

Mulroney retired as Canada's most disliked postwar leader after almost nine years in office to allow a fresh face to lead his party into a general election that must be called by November.

Campbell named her main rival for leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party, Quebec native Jean Charest, as her deputy prime minister and minister of industry and consumer affairs.

Charest was also charged with regional development in the French-speaking province that is key to winning a majority.

Quebec nationalist Gilles Loiselle, Mulroney's Treasury board president, became the country's new finance minister, and business professor Tom Hockin was named trade minister.

Perrin Beatty, 43, a clean-cut Ontarian, became Canada's new secretary of state for external affairs.

Campbell, a native of Vancouver, plans to freeze spending and do away with a \$27.6-billion-a-year deficit that threatens Canada's credit rating and its admired health care system.

She is Canada's first prime minister born in British Columbia on the Pacific coast, and she favors extending the North American Free Trade Agreement to Pacific Rim countries.

President Clinton congratulated Campbell on Friday and said he looks forward to meeting her at next month's Tokyo summit of the Group of Seven industrialized nations.

Campbell has an uphill battle to revive the Conservative party's chances of holding on to power after Mulroney.

A Gallup Poll released Thursday showed the Conservatives have picked up support since Mulroney resigned, but are still trailing the opposition Liberals by five percentage points.

The poll said Conservative support has risen to 36% from 31% a month ago, while the Liberals advanced to 41% from 39% at the expense of the New Democratic Party.

Pollsters said Campbell will have to distance herself from Mulroney's political legacy if she hopes to win a majority.

Mulroney handed in his formal resignation minutes before Campbell was sworn in.

He then drove away with his wife, Mila, in a four-wheel-drive jeep. He will return to his private practice as a corporate lawyer.