

Woman Chosen for First Time to Lead Canada

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OTTAWA — Kim Campbell, a sharp-tongued lawyer and unconventional politician, won the leadership of the country's ruling Progressive Conservative Party on Sunday to become Canada's first female prime minister.

The 46-year-old Campbell, who is the current defense minister, came into the leadership conference as a heavy favorite and won on a second ballot with 1,817 votes to 1,630 for her major challenger, Environment Minister Jean Charest. At 34, the Quebec lawyer had been bidding to become the country's youngest prime minister.

Although Charest made a close contest of it, it was clear after Sunday's initial vote that Campbell would win when she drew 48% of the votes to Charest's 39%.

Under the Canadian parliamentary system, the prime minister is the leader of the party that controls the national legislature. Sunday's vote was made necessary after Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced in February that he is resigning as of June 21.

Not only will Campbell become Canada's first female prime minister, she is also the first to come from British Columbia and represents a major break in the generally conservative stripe of the country's political Establishment.

She's been married twice and divorced twice, and she has no children. She admits having smoked marijuana in her younger days--and enjoying it. And until joining the Progressive Conservative Party four years ago, her only political experience was as a renegade member of the eccentric and often radically right-wing Social Credit Party of British Columbia.

The campaign turned bitter in the last weeks, and the divisions remained evident even after Sunday's final vote. Although Charest in his concession speech called for the convention to make Campbell's nomination unanimous, he never mentioned her by name.

In her following remarks, Campbell pledged that she will lead the party "to the grand prize, a third consecutive majority government." And while she said the party and the country need the talents of all the candidates and their followers, the only words addressed to Charest were a joke about his campaign symbol, the tortoise.

The call for unity was not just lip service. The Progressive Conservatives must call an election by November, leaving Campbell little time to reorganize the government and overcome the party's lagging standings in the polls.

Campbell's victory was all but assured after the three-hour first ballot process ended because she needed to pick up only 2%, against an 11% gain for Charest.

But even with the arithmetic already clearly in her favor, Campbell moved to eliminate any doubt by promising third-place finisher Jim Edwards "a very important position in my Cabinet" if he threw his support behind her.

Under a unique feature of the Canadian system, Edwards, an Alberta member of Parliament, rose from his seat in the overheated hockey arena where the delegates and 5,000 additional politicians and journalists were crammed and walked through the crowd to sit with Campbell.

Edwards endorsed Campbell and urged the 307 delegates who voted for him to follow his lead. That was met by a chorus of boos from many of his supporters.

The vote ended a typical Canadian political struggle: polite, even eloquent on the surface but often shabby and dirty underneath, particularly when Charest's followers suggested that Campbell's gender and lifestyle made her unsuited to political leadership.

Campbell found little controversial in Charest's personal background; with a wife and three children, he seemed the model family man. Campbell's followers instead played to a factor beyond Charest's control, his birthplace.

Charest was born and lives in Quebec. Even though he dropped his teen-age enthusiasm for Quebec independence and has been an effective opponent of provincial nationalism, a strong undercurrent of resentment still remains in English Canada.

Both top candidates were close associates of Mulroney's and had served as senior members of his Cabinet, making it difficult to confront each other on such serious issues as economic policies.

Nevertheless, as the vote neared, both Charest and Campbell spoke of their respective abilities to rescue Canada from its enormous budget deficit, its 11% unemployment, its unraveling social programs and disillusionment with a government viewed as inefficient and riddled with patronage.

The battle's focus was on the so-called "winnability" factor: Which one can beat back the challenge of the Liberal Party, which has been out of power for nine years after dominating Canada for most of the last half-century?

Although Campbell opened a wide lead early on, Charest slowly cut into her support.

Charest, whose seamless, chubby face and curly black hair make him appear even younger than his years, publicly swore off personal attacks, stressing his vigor, his popularity in vote-rich Quebec, his fluency in both French and English and his 10 years' experience in Parliament, including three ministerial portfolios.

But his followers, sometimes not too subtly, played the gender card. Campbell, the product of a broken home, was darkly portrayed as emotional, unstable and temperamentally unsuited for leadership.

http://articles.latimes.com/1993-06-14/news/mn-3026_1_lead-canada

She didn't help herself with her brusque attitude toward Canada's aggressive media and often-rude dismissals of critics.

Nevertheless, a strong organization, tireless campaigning and the cultivation of the point that she represents real change kept her at least even, if not ahead, right up to the Sunday afternoon vote.