



Tuesday, September 23, 2014

Former Prime Minister Kim Campbell Speaks to Carleton Students about Doing Politics Differently

By Kristy Strauss

The Right Honourable Kim Campbell believes that Canada needs to do politics differently.

She delivered that message to a standing-room only audience at Carleton on Sept. 22.

“My slogan refers back to my leadership campaign in 1993,” said Campbell, who was Canada’s first female prime minister. She served from June 25, 1993 to Nov. 4, 1993, when Jean Chretien’s Liberals took control in a federal election.

She opened the lecture with a reading from her memoir *Time and Chance* which discusses how she tried to address the issue of doing politics more broadly in her campaign. Campbell had launched proposals for reform in a number of areas, including government reform and lobbying.

But, she said, they seemed unimportant to the media.

“The issue of process and how we do politics (is) one that the press is uninterested in covering. There is a lot of discussion of alienation, and people fighting the government, but the underlying issue of what’s happening in democracies today doesn’t seem to get the traction it really needs.”

Campbell spoke about her participation in the Club of Madrid, the largest forum of democratic leaders promoting democratic values.

The forum brings together former leaders who can speak honestly about their experiences and provide advice to help promote the development of democracies.

One of the annual meetings she had attended was focused on understanding the decline in democratic vitality – even among the more mature democracies in the world.

Canada is no exception, she said, and there is still a lot of work that needs to be done.

“People feel their members of Parliament go to Ottawa and can’t speak their minds and they are under control of the party leader.”

But that’s not always the way it works, she said, and members of Parliament need to get credit when they address their constituency’s concerns.

She gave the example of former Muskoka MP Stan Darling, who lobbied the government for a ticketing regime for operating boats on the lakes of Muskoka.

“He never sat in cabinet, but he did a lot of good for his constituency and never got credit,” Campbell said, adding that she was the minister to bring the issue forward and she called it the Stan Darling bill.

There are many things done at the institutional level that work against how people see democracy in today’s day and age, she said.

“The time has come to see how we can make institutions more credible and more functional.”

Campbell has focused a lot of her attention on global work where she sees countries trying to create democratic regimes.

“It makes me realize how what we have in Canada is so precious, and how destructive it will be if we decline and don’t create a sense of importance to preserve our efforts in each generation. Doing politics differently is our challenge.”

The lecture, which took place in the River Building, was sponsored by the Pauline Jewett Institute of Women’s and Gender Studies at Carleton, the Department of Political Science, The Hon. Dick and Ruth Bell Chair for the Study of Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, Carleton University Students’ Association, Famous 5 CGA-Canada Outreach Program and the Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy.