

Harper's image makes 'summer of fun' no picnic

Did your heart give a bit of a flip? Did a small thrill run through your body when you heard the good news?

The good news is that Conservative leader Stephen Harper is coming this way for a summer of fun: barbecues, golf tournaments, parades, festivals, country fairs, coffee parties, church socials, and so on. Much of his time will be spent right here in Southern Ontario, where we will soon find him find him mainstreering, door-knocking, shooting the breeze in Tim Hortons and — who knows? — maybe kissing babies at bus stops.

As Harper explained to the press, his wife Laureen was on his case. "My wife said to me recently, 'You do need to have more fun. You're not having enough fun, even by your standards,'" the leader said. "So we'll do something about that."

True to his word, he set out to have fun the very next day. There he was on Parliament Hill, tossing a football with his deputy leader, Peter MacKay. By Harper's standards, he seemed to be having fun. He'd removed his suit coat



GEOFFREY STEVENS

and even loosened his tie just a bit.

It's easy to make light of Harper's effort to emulate what other politicians do naturally (or learn to do in a seemingly natural fashion) — to relax, be informal, go out and meet Canadians where they live and work, talk to them about their interests, and take pleasure in the experience.

Harper's a smart guy. He knows he has an image problem, that Canadians have trouble warming to someone who seems so cerebral, distant and perhaps disinterested in their everyday concerns. The ability to connect with people may have nothing to do with a politician's ability to run a govern-

ment, but it has a great deal to do with his or her ability to get elected, especially in an age when voters form lasting impressions from the glimpses they see of politicians on television. And voters don't connect with politicians who seem congenitally incapable of enjoying themselves.

While it can be argued that his policies are as big a problem as his personality, Harper clearly has his work cut out for him in the image department. The Conservatives talk of adding a substantial number of seats to the 24 they took in Ontario in the federal election a year ago (23 since the departure of Belinda Stronach). They hope Conservative Gary Goodyear's victory in Cambridge was a harbinger of good things to come.

They'd like nothing better than to knock off Karen Redman in Kitchener Centre, partly because the Conservatives want desperately to make a real breakthrough in urban Ontario, and partly because of Redman's profile as chief government whip. But she looks very safe. Her margin last year was

8,852 votes, which worked out to 20 per cent of the total vote cast in the riding.

It would also take a major upset for Conservatives to win Kitchener-Waterloo where Liberal Andrew Telegdi's margin of victory was 19 per cent or Guelph where Liberal Brenda Chamberlain's margin was 18 per cent.

As a rule of thumb, a seat is considered vulnerable if the margin separating the winner from the runner-up is 10 per cent or less of the vote cast in the riding. By this measure, veteran Liberal Lynn Myers is vulnerable in Kitchener-Conestoga. Myers won by only seven per cent last year, and the Conservatives' opposition to same-sex marriage plays well in rural polls there.

Unfortunately for Harper as he launches his summer of fun, he can't simply worry about making new inroads. Given the opinion polls — which show the Liberals still mired in minority-government territory but the Conservatives losing ground in Ontario — Harper needs to worry, first, about protecting his own shaky seats.

Cambridge heads the worry list. Goodyear beat Liberal incumbent Janko Peric by just 224 votes last June. That was 0.4 per cent of the vote cast. If 113 voters switch sides, Peric, who is running again, would be on his way back to Ottawa.

The 10-per-cent rule suggests Harper needs to worry about at least two other seats in the area: Wellington-Halton Hills (where Conservative Mike Chong beat Liberal Bruce Hood by 4.6 per cent) and Perth-Wellington (Conservative Gary Schellenberger by 8.6 per cent over Liberal Brian Innes).

Harper will need all the help he can get this summer. So perhaps he would permit a small suggestion: Sir, most people find football more fun when played without a necktie.

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AIDS IN AFRICA

Bring in doctors to vanquish deadly virus

BY THOMAS J. COATES

I've been working on and with HIV/AIDS since 1982, and the only thing that keeps me going is hope. The sheer crush of the epidemic, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, can be overwhelming.

It was easier to be hopeful in the early days of the epidemic. We were sure then that we could conquer HIV. The gay community made behavioural changes and new infections went way down. Researchers quickly identified the virus that caused the disease, and the antibody test came soon after. We were told a vaccine was just a few years away.

I long ago abandoned my enthusiasm that we will prevail in the short run. HIV has taught us that there are no easy solutions. HIV is strong and clever and will survive.

U.S. President George W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the largest single global initiative on HIV/AIDS, commits \$15 billion US over five years to help bring anti-HIV medications to parts of the world hit the hardest.

I have seen the results firsthand. Physicians in South Africa and Uganda, where I work, are suddenly enlivened, energetic and hopeful. And so are their patients.

ONE DOCTOR FOR 30,000 PATIENTS

But the lack of qualified, trained health-care workers remains a major hurdle in many low-income nations. Sub-Saharan Africa has 25 per cent of the world's burden of the disease but only 1.3 per cent of the world's physicians. Mozambique has one physician for every 30,000 people, compared with one for every 360 in the United States.

A recent report by the Institute of Medicine advocates addressing that need by creating a United States Global Health Service Corps. It would consist of full-time, salaried professionals willing to commit two years or more to living and working in hard-hit countries.

They would provide medical care and drug therapy while training local health-care workers and giving them clinical, technical and managerial assistance.

The institute also recommends creating one-year fellowships for health-care providers and a system under which physicians and other professionals could repay their medical school loans by working in needy communities outside the U.S.

A health service corps, like the Peace Corps, could bring knowledge, encouragement and hope to beleaguered health workers around the world. It could give health professionals an avenue for sharing their knowledge. It also could capture the American imagination and inspire people to do better, as the Peace Corps has done since its creation more than four decades ago. The Peace Corps experience changes its volunteers, and they come home and change the people around them.

I recently met two physicians whose actions demonstrate the goodwill that awaits endeavours such as those the institute recommends.

Perry Jansen founded Partners in Hope, with the assistance of Christian and gay communities in Los Angeles. He moved his family to Malawi, one of the world's poorest countries, where he is working with the African Bible College to build and sustain a clinic.

His business model shows that the operation should become self-sustaining within three years.

In addition to diagnosing and treating people with HIV, Perry and his wife created prevention programs in the villages, a home-based care program and an inpatient nutrition ward. They adopted an AIDS orphan, Olivia, who was six



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Georgina, herself an abandoned child, looks at baby Sarah at the Door of Hope in the Berea Baptist Mission Church in Hillbrow, a downtrodden Johannesburg neighbourhood. About 3,000 babies, many with HIV, are abandoned each year in South Africa.

months old and weighed six pounds when they took her in. She is thriving.

Kim Shiner, director of the Phil Simon Clinic at Huntington Hospital in Pasadena, Calif., founded the Tanzania Project in Arusha. The clinic provides funding, training and support and has sent or carried several tonnes of medical supplies to Tanzania. Pasadena physicians have provided medical care to more than 400 patients there.

Many other health professionals want to do the same, if

only they knew how. The Health Services Corps and the other programs the institute recommends could be their vehicle.

• *Los Angeles Times*

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Ignore Liberals and Conservatives in the next election

About three weeks ago, I reacted angrily to Conservative MP Gurmant Grewal's allegations that Tim Murphy and Ujjal Dosanjh tried to bribe him out of his seat.

Hearing that tapes existed of the conversations made me lose what confidence I had in the Liberal party — so much so that I ignored the timing of the announcement: on the day the Liberals faced a key vote of confidence.

Grewal's move was designed to hit them as hard as possible as they went into an election.

I still have no confidence that the Liberals can govern, but revelations that Grewal or someone may have tampered with those tapes have brought me to an uncomfortable conclusion: In the next election, the Liberals have to be defeated. And the Conservatives have to go down with them.

The Conservative party showed startling ineptitude in its handling of the Grewal tapes. Somebody should have known that any suggestion that the tapes weren't valid records of what happened would be pounced upon.



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The decision to hold back the complete record from even the Conservative party website for 13 days and the decision to release the tapes in altered selections suggested that Grewal, at least, had a lot to hide.

Grewal may have stepped aside on stress leave, but the damage has been done. Despite there being in existence a tape where the minister of health and a member of the Prime Minister's Office appear to talk rewards to an MP who might switch his vote, a recent Decima poll shows more than three in four Canadians have abandoned the Conservative party.

But it's not all bad news for the Conservatives. The Liberals are still where they were last election — the lowest level of support ever given to the most popular party in an election.

Voters are angry at the Liberals, but they want somebody to vote for, rather than vote against. Conservatives have been telling Stephen Harper that now is the time to look prime ministerial. Now is the time to speak positively on Conservative policy.

Instead, Harper downplays the Conservative platform and campaigns on the ills of the Liberal party. He obstructs the business of Parliament. He tries to force an election that most voters don't want. He sanctions what might be a sting operation to make the Liberals look bad rather than make the Conservatives look good. He attacks those who disagree with him.

What if this is as prime ministerial as Harper gets? If this is how Harper handles Conservative strategy, how will he handle a Quebec referendum? If his outbursts at Belinda Stronach and Danny Williams are an example of how he

handles criticism from allies, how will he handle real dissent from the electorate?

Martin lacks vision; Harper is intelligent. But where Martin is congenial, Harper is surly. Both are running not because they want to lead, but because they want to win. In short, both men epitomize danger and Harper seems to have a mean streak. Neither should be allowed inside 24 Sussex Drive.

Which means we have set ourselves a nasty task. The sitting prime minister and the person most likely to replace him are equally odious, and the parties that support them command 60 per cent of the vote.

Liberal and Conservative supporters, some of whom know how bad the situation is, remain where they are because they fear that moving to a better alternative means giving the other side the advantage.

But Canadians are realizing the desperation of this scenario. Most are choosing not to vote, but some are looking elsewhere. NDP numbers are up; Green party numbers are also up. The

situation needs only a push to send things along.

It's time to remind Canadians that, just because the top two choices for this country's leadership stink, the choice doesn't end there. Refusing to vote, while understandable, confers upon the winning party as much of a mandate as if everyone voted. If just half the people who didn't vote in the last election voted for a party other than the Liberals or the Conservatives, it would be the biggest political earthquake ever to hit Ottawa.

The Liberals and Conservatives are behaving badly because they believe they are the only choice for Canadians, and that they are each a sucker punch away from grabbing hold of a majority government. A decision to not vote is not a message these mainstream parties can hear. It's time for all Canadians to stand up and be counted. It's time to vote for someone else.

• *James Bow of Kitchener is a graduate of the University of Waterloo's regional and urban planning department.*