

Canada in position to become world leader: Finance Minister

by Donna Danielli

With the dawning of a new century, Canada is on the brink of a new and exciting future. That was the message Minister of Finance Paul Martin delivered to a crowd of over 200 people on April 5 at Granite Ridge Golf Club.

"I believe we are about to embark on the most significant economic transformation of our time," Mr. Martin - the new Liberal candidate in the next provincial election - announced to the cheering crowd.

Before expanding on the strength of Canada's economy, he began the evening by joking that perhaps being the Minister of Finance, on such public display during a time period when most Canadians are filling out their tax forms, wasn't the safest place for him to be. Nonetheless he carried

on. "We have just come through the first global slowdown for the last 35 years," he stated. "Despite that, the Canadian economy has continued to create jobs, while other economies are losing. In fact, we are the only G7 country, apart from the United Kingdom, that has actually created jobs over the course of the last year. We have the greatest amount of economic growth of any G7 country last year and we've projected to have that growth next year."

The stability of the Canadian economy has not only led to new jobs and a high standard of living, it has also granted the country the ability to tackle its deficit.

"We have actually retired more debt in the past four years than any other major industrial country,"

explained Mr. Martin. "Today we are the only G7 country without a deficit."

However, this is no time for the government to rest on its laurels and congratulate itself on a job well done.

"What we now have to do is not speak as Liberals about the last nine years," he urged the audience, "but, we've got to speak about the next nine years. How do we take that new-found financial strength? How do we take the confidence that Canadians have in themselves and what they can do? And how do we give our children a better future?"

Mr. Martin expounded on the importance of a Liberal provincial government in the next election, thus creating a unified provincial and federal government.

"The federal and provincial governments have to stop fighting about healthcare. There is no reason that as Canadians we can't have the best healthcare system in the world, and there is no reason that as Canadians we can't have the best education system in the world."

One of Canada's main objectives in the next decade and beyond should be grasping the opportunities presented to it.

"The environment is not a problem, it is a phenomenal opportunity. Agriculture provides us with a tremendous opportunity in terms of renewable energy. The environ-



Photo by Donna Danielli

Halton Liberal MP Julian Reed, Paul Martin and John Day.

ment is an opportunity for Canada to take a leadership role in the world."

Mr. Martin's speech focussed strongly on Canada's place in the world economy. He noted the international banking summits, which were cancelled by the September 11 tragedy, were finally held in Ottawa because it was the only country's capital other countries could agree to meet in.

"There is no doubt that we live in a world with one huge superpower, but also a world that is going to have to be able to come together, a world that is going to have to cooperate as it never has before," he said. "We, as Canadians, have a tremendous opportunity to take a leadership role in the kind of world we're going to build. There is a regard in which our country is held by the rest of the world that we constantly tend to underestimate, but it is now important that we stand up for what we believe. It is important that we take that leadership position."

Mr. Martin acknowledged the temptation some Canadians might feel to move to the U.S. to be part of that huge economic power.

But he urged Canadians to

remember "we were bequeathed by our parents and our grandparents a country of immense richness and power and we have a responsibility to make sure that our children, and our grandchildren, have the country to enjoy as a great successful nation."

Mr. Martin conveyed to the wildly enthusiastic crowd that Canada has the resources and the economic strength to ensure its relationships and negotiations with the rest of the globe.

"Our prosperity and the prosperity of our farmers depends on a world where we don't allow massive American subsidies to shorten the market," he expounded. "It depends on a world where we deal with our environmental problems. It depends on a world where the trading nations like Canada, are able to trade without having it shut off by a Congress that simply doesn't understand what free trade is all about. Here in the northern part of North America, we will set the standards that the southern part of North America can follow and if we do that, there is no doubt in my mind that Sir Wilfred Laurier will be right. He was a century out, but the 21st century will be ours."

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