

Reform party comes to UPEI

Young MPs try to dispel myths surrounding their politics

BY ERIN FAGAN

Two young Reform Members of Parliament visited the UPEI campus on September 16th, attempting to spread the message that the party isn't quite so "evil, crazy, and radical."

Edmonton MP Rahim Jaffer and Calgary MP Jason Kenney spoke at a non-partisan session organized by the department of political studies. Before an audience of approximately fifty students and faculty, two of the youngest members in the House of Commons spoke of how they got involved in politics and as to why they chose the Reform Party.

According to Jaffer and Kenney, they both became involved in politics during high school, originally as young Liberals. As they received degrees in political science and delved further into federal politics, they grew disillusioned with that party.

"As a young person, I felt more like window dressing," stated Kenney, noting that there are no MPs in the Liberal caucus under the age of thirty-five.

Jaffer, 26, who once worked under MP Dennis Miller, personally discovered that democracy was somewhat lacking in Parliament. Jaffer saw that Miller would be marginalized if his views were not shared by the party when presenting ideas to other caucus members.

"I wanted to help make the system work better," he said. "I saw in the Reform party that youth were given more leadership roles, and were valued. Manning and others seemed to understand that youth are the ones who will live with the consequences of what we do today."

Kenney, as former president of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation for six years, was attracted to the economic views of the party.

"I looked a little bit closer, and came away persuaded."

They presented the four corners of the Reform Party platform during the middle of their presentation, the first issue concerning what Kenney called "fiscal responsibility." Emphasis was placed on debtloads and high taxes.

"Canadians spend more on taxes than they do on the necessities of life... working longer hours and taking home less," he explained.

The second issue concerns social responsibility. Kenney described "core social programs" as being priorities for the party and the nation, and told of the importance of reducing spending in the right areas and reducing grants and subsidies to business.

Included in the discussion on social responsibility was reform to the criminal justice system, with anti-parole policies and tough reforms to the Young Offenders Act, and the placing of great emphasis upon the family unit, a "basic institu-

tion" which is one of their "top priorities."

The third issue was the issue of democratic accountability.

"Canadian parliament is one if the least responsive and the least democratic," said Kenney. "A marvelous system has been mutated into something that no longer works"

One of these democratic reforms concerns the senate, which Kenney described as a "private patronage chamber for the Prime Minister."

"We Reformers get beat up a lot because of PEI because among other things we support a 'Triple-E' senate. By that we mean one in which all provinces are equal, one that is elected and one that has effective power", Kenney said, adding that, with improved accountability, the Senate would be restored to its original role as "a check and balance."

"The Senate was created to be a second sober thought.... Because the Sen-

ate has become a place for patronage appointments, we have seen the House of Commons become divided along regional lines," added Jaffer.

Kenney also called for direct democratic measures, such as more frequent referendums and plebiscites on issues which are of national importance. Finally, democratic reform would entail reforming the House of Commons so that the Prime Minister and "cronies" would have less power. Members of Parliament would also have more freedom to represent their constituencies during free votes.

Finally, Jaffer spoke on the unity issue. As the head of the New Canada project, he has been touring Quebec of late and serving as the point man in that province, "trying to get dialogue" according to Jaffer.

"Concerns any regions have are very similar. It's not a problem with each other, but a problem with how Ottawa interacts with the provinces."

Jaffer stressed a need to make every province equal in power.

During a question period afterwards, one major question concerned the Reform Party's stand on minimum wage. The MPs agreed that wages should be what the labor market decides.

"In Alberta, we have not only the lowest minimum wage [\$5.80/hour] but also the lowest unemployment rate," said Kenney.

According to economic studies, they said, abolishing minimum wage would allow those who deserve to be paid more to receive something beyond that flat, minimum rate. Without minimum wage restrictions, they said, employers would hire more people and more jobs would be available in the service industries for young people. *[It should be noted that it is Prince Edward Island that apparently has the lowest minimum wage at \$5.40. -news ed.]*

"As a businessman, I feel there lacks a meritocracy in the system. Wages should be based upon the value of the employee," said Jaffer.

On the issue of student loans, Kenney advocated the idea of income-contingency loans, which would be based upon an individual's financial ability to pay. For those who are able to find employment after graduation, he said, there should be legislation to deduct the interest from the debts and to facilitate paying the loans back.

"The biggest concern for students is finding quality work, and the party is committed to creating more and better jobs. . . lower taxes on goods, including text books."

Lori Boswell, a UPEI student who attended the presentation with her political studies class, was not impressed.

"I was not satisfied with the answers to any of their questions," she said.



Two members of the Reform Party "Snack Pack" visited UPEI recently. (L-R) Calgary MP Jason Kenney and Edmonton MP Rahim Jaffer.

photo by R.Haines