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News

'We will never lose the North'

Dion vows to fight poverty, protect environment, Arctic sovereignty

By KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU CHIEF



Stephane Dion speaks with residents of Iqaluit, Nunavut during a campaign stop yesterday. (Adrian Wyld, The Canadian Press)

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IQALUIT -- Liberal Leader Stephane Dion brought his campaign to the North last night, promising to help fight poverty and protect the environment.

Dion, who will meet with Native elders today, blasted Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's "use it or lose it" plan to protect Arctic sovereignty.

"I'm sorry, but you are here since millenniums, nobody should tell you that," he told a rally of about 50 supporters. "We will never lose the North because the North is yours and for us, for all of us, it's important to show to the world that the people who are in the North since millenniums will always be considered fully as Canadians on their territory and we will give everything to you for your development."

Dion said a Liberal government would assert Arctic sovereignty, starting with being good custodians of the North and proud of the people who live there.

BAROMETER OF THE PLANET

Dion also said a Liberal government is the best party to fight climate change, which is having the most dramatic impact on the North.

"The Arctic is the great barometer of the planet," he said. "I fought to keep the Arctic part of my country as a Quebecker, because I know I am stronger with you and that altogether we have a great future because we have a responsibility to show to the world that Canada will handle the crisis of climate change."

Dion said Nunavut Liberal candidate Kirt Ejesiak, who has an MA from Harvard University, represents the "past and the future" of Nunavut and Canada.

Earlier in the day, Dion campaigned in the Maritimes, where he played up the merits of his much-maligned carbon scheme: "Massive" tax cuts for families.

Slumped in the polls with the final day of reckoning in sight, Dion dropped the tie and teleprompters in a bid to sell his "Liberal plan for the people" yesterday.

He cast Stephen Harper as the "bubble" man who's out of touch with Canadians worried about jobs and the planet; Jack Layton as the outdated socialist whose ideas would kill employment.

He made a direct pitch to Canadians to block Harper by giving the NDP a pass.

"The only job a vote for the NDP will save is Stephen Harper's job," he said.

LAYTON SLAMS DION

Making his own Atlantic swing yesterday, Layton said Dion "can't win" because of his unpopular carbon tax proposal. He urged voters to vote NDP to stop Harper.

Harper, who won't release a full platform until Tuesday, announced a \$300-million regional development package for the east, west and Quebec.

A Nanos Research poll released yesterday showed the Liberals made a two-point dip after a bounce after last week's French-language debate. But New Brunswick incumbent Dominic LeBlanc insisted the race isn't yet over.

"There's always enough time," he said. "I think Mr. Harper has been deliberately dishonest in trying to confuse people and tell them the Green Shift is something it's not."

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