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NDP outlines concerns over upcoming SPP meeting

Fri 17 Aug 2007 | [Printer friendly](#)

Layton writes letter to PM demanding action on four key areas

OTTAWA – On the eve of the upcoming North American Leader’s summit in Montebello on the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), NDP Leader Jack Layton has outlined four major concerns he wants Prime Minister Stephen Harper to address with his American and Mexican counterparts.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Layton stresses the need for Canada to assert itself on the issues of climate change, the growing prosperity gap, indigenous peoples and security.

“Enhancing the security, prosperity and quality of life for North Americans must be pursued with vigor,” writes Layton. “The lack of clarity around the SPP’s mandate, initiatives and future scope does not inspire confidence. Canadians need to know that our country’s sovereignty won’t be surrendered by moves to deepen continental integration.”

Layton is demanding that the Prime Minister ensure briefings be made available to the opposition in order to bring transparency to the process.

The full text of the letter is attached.

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Friday, August 17, 2007

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A3

Re: Meeting in Montebello, Quebec

As you know, the New Democratic Party of Canada has long been concerned about the lack of transparency associated with ongoing discussions on the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) of North America. Canadians, and indeed all North Americans, need to be apprised of the important and far-reaching matters that are being discussed by their leaders so that they can make properly informed judgments about the decisions that are being taken on their behalf.

Enhancing the security, prosperity and quality of life for North Americans must be pursued with vigor. However, the lack of clarity around the SPP’s mandate, initiatives, and future scope concerns does not inspire confidence. Canadians need to know that our country’s sovereignty won’t be surrendered by moves to deepen continental integration.

That is why I felt it important to write to you in July expressing my concern about the security measures being taken for the North American Leaders’ summit in Montebello, including the excessive 25 kilometre perimeter around the meeting site. Since the APEC Summit was held in Vancouver 10 years ago, world leaders have learned that there must be mechanisms for public consultation and participation at inter-governmental meetings. That this democratic need is being ignored in Montebello is of great concern to Canadians.

SPP has the potential to have a far-reaching impact on everyday Canadians, but to-date there has been no public consultation or debate in Parliament. Your government has no mandate at this summit to lock Canada into an agreement of continental integration that seeks to undemocratically harmonize and weaken health, safety, and environmental standards. Instead, the NDP calls on you to take this opportunity to discuss issues that will strengthen the security, prosperity and quality of life for all North Americans, including tackling climate change, closing the growing prosperity gap, respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and re-evaluating recent security initiatives.

Climate Change

The international community has now reached a consensus that strong and early action must be taken to tackle climate change in order to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would

prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. As preparations are underway for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Indonesia in December 2007 with a view to achieving a comprehensive post-2012 agreement, North American leaders must discuss the serious targets and measures they are prepared to adopt in order to prevent a 2 degree Celsius increase in global surface temperature before 2050.

Prosperity Gap

In discussing the goal of enhancing prosperity in North America, it is important to address the fact that there is a significant "prosperity gap" within and between our countries. Some people and places are benefiting from good economic times, while many regions, sectors and segments of the populations are falling even further behind. The benefits of trade liberalization, including NAFTA, have not been equally distributed, a fact that should not be ignored. Measures to address the growing gap must be discussed.

Indigenous Peoples

Mexico, the United States and Canada are all home to important communities of indigenous peoples who deserve fairness and respect from their governments. This Fall, the United Nations General Assembly will vote on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. North American leaders must be at the forefront in supporting this Declaration.

Security

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, our countries have taken measures, including military action, in attempts to counter and undermine terrorist activity domestically and internationally. North American leaders must evaluate the extent to which aggressive military counter-insurgency efforts and anti-terrorist laws that restrict and remove fundamental human rights are furthering or hindering the goal of achieving peace and security. Multilateralism, respect for human rights and peace-seeking approaches must be the hallmarks of efforts to bolster security.

In conclusion, I formally request that you make briefings available to all opposition critics on summit outcomes related to their portfolios.

Sincerely yours,

Hon. Jack Layton, M.P., PC

Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada



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