



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cancellation of the Liberal Party's 2003 Biennial Convention

Toronto - Tuesday 27 August 2002

*Akaash Maharaj,
has released the following letter, previously sent to the Liberal Party's National
Executive on the potential cancellation of the 2003 Biennial Convention.*

To Stephen LeDrew, LPC President

I am writing to follow-up on my conversation with you secretary of last Wednesday. As I have yet to hear back from you, I thought it best to communicate in writing. Moreover, given the gravity of the matter before us, I thought it only right to copy this letter to our fellow members of the National Executive.

I understand that the Management Committee will be asked to consider the question of cancelling the 2003 Biennial Convention.

If a leadership convention is set for some time in 2003, I understand that it would be necessary to cancel the Biennial Convention for obvious logistical reasons. If, however, the leadership convention is set for 2004, it is my hope that the Management Committee will recommend preserving the Biennial Convention, not only for reasons of practicality, but more importantly, to observe basic standards of democratic integrity.

From a practical perspective, you will be aware that cancelling the Biennial Convention at this stage will invite financial penalties running into the tens of thousands of dollars, penalties the Party can ill afford given our multi-million dollar debt. Moreover, given that every Biennial Convention we have held since taking office in 1993 has returned a substantial profit to the Liberal Party, it is worth emphasising that not only can we afford to hold the convention in February 2003 (at least a full year before a 2004 leadership convention), but that to not hold the Biennial Convention would be to sacrifice those badly needed revenues.

From an ethical perspective, I believe that every member of the National Executive is keenly aware that we are serving the Party on borrowed time, to put it at its most charitable. The previous decision to delay the Biennial Convention by eleven months effectively extended our terms in office by fifty-percent. Were we to cancel the Biennial Convention altogether in favour of a leadership convention in 2004, we would be doubling our terms in office, from two years to four years. When foreign governments

have cancelled constitutionally mandated elections and illegally extended their terms in office, Liberal governments have never flinched from condemning them in the harshest of terms. For the Liberal Party itself to fall short of standards we expect of foreign dictatorships, would be to bring ourselves, our Party, and our government into public disrepute.

It is never more important that the National Executive be (and be seen to be) legitimate and committed to upholding the rule of law, than when our Party is embarking upon an inevitably divisive leadership election. I fear that cancelling our own elections will cast grave public doubt on our ability to ethically and fairly administer the election of our new leader.

Finally, as National Policy Chair, I am especially concerned that without a Biennial Convention in 2003, we will have six years between policy conventions. For us to allow six years to elapse without calling our members together to discuss ideas, to craft our vision, or to define what it is we wish to achieve in office, would be an outrage against any conception of our Party as an entity concerned with the public interest. It would be equivalent to making a public declaration that our Party is unconcerned with why we seek office, and is merely absorbed with a craven desire to wield power for its own sake.

There are those who would argue that with a new leader entering office, there will be an opportunity for policy debate on the campaign trail. However, those making this argument forget that the Party is not merely an extension of any one leader; we are first and foremost a collection of Canadians who have come together in pursuit of a common vision of the public interest, and who have a duty to define and give voice to vision, irrespective of who holds the leadership. In essence, it is the leader who must serve the Party's vision, not the other way around.

I realise that the National Executive will have the final decision on the Biennial Convention. I also realise that the recommendation of the Management Committee will set the tone for the National Executive's discussions.

I hope that my views will be useful to the Management Committee in coming to a decision.

Yours sincerely,
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National Policy Chair, Liberal Party of Canada

- 30 -

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