



Let's get the job done!

Policy paper number 7:

Building our party

January 2012

Dear friend,

When I launched my campaign to be leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, I offered the view that the primary goal of the NDP national government we will elect in 2015 should (and must) be to work, in everything we do, toward building a more equal Canada.

An important place to start is to remember – and build on – the principles and values of our party. In my paper, *What the NDP is all about: Social democracy, and a more equal Canada*, I spell out what I hold those principles and values to be. This includes where we find common ground with Liberals (we all work for equality of opportunity), and where we differ fundamentally (as social democrats, we seek substantive equality – measured in employment, greater income equality, equality between women and men and among all communities, and access to fundamentals like public health care, education, pensions and a clean environment).

The New Democratic Party of Canada is not just another corporate brand in a game of musical chairs, aiming to manage the status quo. Ours is a social democratic party, a living party, a party driven by its members. We are a party that is about bringing change to Canada and so the democratic and organizational life of our party is critically important. We are not just electing a Parliamentary leader in this race. We are electing the leader of our party, the person who must lead the work of building and advancing the NDP as a political party. Candidates for the leadership therefore owe you thoughtful and well-articulated views on how our party will be built and how its work will move us all forward.

I offer you my views on some of the issues in this paper. In summary, I believe:

- **We need to return to federal field organizing and outreach immediately, and pursue it with determination for the next three years at many levels and in many ways;**
- **We need to substantially reinforce our fundraising ability at both the national and riding level;**
- **Drawing on input from our members, from independent voices like the Broadbent Institute, and from the growing number of others interested in working with our party, the NDP should conduct a detailed policy review leading up to our 2013 convention; and**
- **Our national executive, federal council, and federal riding associations need to get back to work as functioning democratic bodies.**

I set out my view on cooperating with other parties at the end of this paper. In summary, I don't support merging with other parties at either the national, regional or local level. I do strongly support committing to cooperate with other parties in the next Parliament if that is what it will take to replace the Harper government – either through case-by-case cooperation, a budget accord, a governing accord, or a coalition government.

This is the seventh in a series of policy papers I've released during this leadership campaign. You can find all of them at www.briantopp.ca. If you liked this one, please forward it to others you think might be interested. I welcome your comments and suggestions. And if I've persuaded you to support my campaign, please get in touch with me through my website to volunteer or donate.

All the best,
Brian Topp

The next campaign started in May 2011

What we must keep in mind, when we consider our political work together, is that the next election campaign began last May. Mr. Harper's government is waging a permanent campaign, as is evident from the entirely political nature of their conduct in Parliament, and from what passes as their governing agenda. One of the many tragedies of this leadership race is that the necessary inward focus it requires is taking valuable time away from our political and campaign work— we will have lost a year by the time we are fully back to focusing on our only real opponent, Mr. Harper.

So we will have to catch up and make that work count.

One of the reasons I decided to step forward as a candidate for leader is that I don't need on-the-job training, from a standing start, when it comes to party building – I've worked closely with all four of our last federal leaders in this area. Look how far we've come. Let's build from here.

So what is to be done?

(1) We need to get back to our outreach work as quickly as possible

Our party should not and must not leave its organizing and outreach work to a three or four-month period in 2015. For the first time in our history, we face the challenge of building up riding associations in more than one hundred incumbent ridings. We also face the opportunity to put together winning teams in more than one hundred other ridings where we came in second in the last election – often a predictor of where we'll win next time.

As party finances permit, I propose we rehire a national field team immediately, and keep that team in place, working steadily on party organization and outreach, right through to the 2015 election.

"Organization" is about building up our party and its campaign capacity in incumbent ridings, ridings we came second in, and other ridings right across Canada.

"Outreach" is about detailed, sustained outreach to communities we need much better and deeper relationships with – First Nations, new Canadian communities (Punjabi, Chinese, Tamil, Filipino, Arab and Jewish, and many other communities, who are open to our party as never before), the business community, our labour partners, civil society groups, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community, the arts community, and many others.

(2) We need to reinforce our fundraising capacity

Successful campaigns ask themselves where they want to be, and work backward from there. We are going to need about \$25 million to fund our next central campaign, and another \$25 million or so to fund competitive campaigns in 200+ local riding campaigns. We have never tried to contest that many competitive ridings before, nor have we ever tried to put together that much money.

To get this work done, our key assets are the 100,000+ members we will have when this leadership race is over. Members don't want to be treated like bank machines. They won't fund our party if all they hear from us are fundraising appeals. So it is crucial that our fundraising needs be addressed through a

relationship with our members – one that reaches much deeper than direct mail appeals and fundraising emails.

I propose:

At the national level: a very substantial reinforcement of our federal fundraising team, and a very determined three-year effort to build up our base of monthly PACs; our regular giving campaigns; and a highly active, issue-driven, new-media-savvy weekly contact program that engages our members in the federal issues we are working on, gives them ways to get involved, and invites them to help through their donations as well as their political work.

At the riding level: part of the core work of our organizing and outreach team must be to work with incumbent MPs and candidates to ensure they have the resources they need to contest their ridings. This is the basic work of assembling friends and supporters of our local candidate into a core giving team; "inkblotting" out from that core to build a second ring of local donors; building out the riding association, and getting members onto local PACs and regular giving campaigns; and conducting an active three-year outreach into the community, including a series of local fundraising events.

Modern fundraising is both a highly centralized, capital-intensive challenge, and a key local priority. All of our provincial sections face the same challenges we do. The federal party has a strong interest in the political success of our provincial sections – for example, the election of NDP Premier Adrian Dix in British Columbia in 2013 will set up our 2015 federal B.C. campaign (and may well provide a prototype for the kind of campaign we will need to run federally to defeat and replace a conservative opponent in a one-on-one contest).

I propose a careful conversation with all sections of our party to consider pooling fundraising and expertise.

(3) A fundamental policy review, culminating at our next convention

It is the responsibility of leadership candidates to set out their ideas and proposals during this race, clearly and in detail – addressing the tough questions (like public finance) as well as the easier ones (like what we would like to spend public funds on). But as Robert Chisholm argued correctly a few months ago, ultimately our party deliberates collectively on our policies and priorities. We are going to ask a great deal of our members in the next three years. One of the most important things we should ask of them is to participate in a careful discussion about our policies and priorities as we prepare to ask for a governing mandate.

I propose that our party launch an open, participatory, wide-ranging review of its fiscal, economic, environmental, social and foreign policies and priorities, culminating in a convention centered on this work.

As I committed to do at our last convention, I also believe the national executive should investigate a redrafting of the preamble to our party constitution. We need to create a text which more fully captures our principles and values, without losing touch with our fundamental identity as a social democratic/democratic socialist party – the Canadian affiliate of Socialist International, proudly associated with the British Labour Party, the German Social Democratic Party, the French Socialist Party,

the Australian Labour Party, the New Zealand Labour Party, and many other sister parties who share our roots, values, challenges, hopes and dreams.

(4) Letting our party's elected bodies breathe again

Our party spent most of the previous decade on permanent election alert, due to the series of minority parliaments elected during that period. I served as national campaign director for much of that time – and I can report that putting together four federal election campaigns in seven years was both an exhilarating and exciting time for our party (we did, after all, grow from 13 to 103 seats, and from 8 per cent of the vote to more than 30 per cent). But it was also a time that put a great deal of strain on our party's elected democratic bodies. I don't celebrate the election of a majority Conservative government, but it does make the timing of the next election more predictable.

It is time to allow our party's elected democratic bodies to breathe again – to meet regularly; to deal with the important issues before our party in orderly face-to-face meetings; to take the time to consider important matters (like our policy review, and the foundational words in our preamble) carefully; and therefore to ensure the collective wisdom of our party is brought to bear on our work. If elected, I will ensure this happens, starting immediately after this leadership race is over.

(5) On cooperation with other parties

I served as one of the lead negotiators of the 1999 NDP-Liberal coalition government in Saskatchewan, which governed that province well for four years, and then was re-elected. Working closely with former MP and now BC MLA Dawn Black, I also served as co-lead negotiator for the federal NDP in 2008, which led to an agreement to replace the Harper government with a Liberal-NDP coalition. Very unfortunately for Canada, the Liberals reneged on their signatures on that agreement, bringing us seven unnecessary years of Conservative government, which we will end in 2015. In light of our experience, where does cooperation with other parties fit into our work?

One of the many things we must learn from our breakthrough in Quebec is that our party is capable of winning where it has not won before. Therefore, I don't favour pulling out of any riding in Canada, in order to let the candidate from another party win.

I do believe we should explicitly commit during this leadership race, over the next three years, and during the next campaign, that if the results in the next Parliament justify it, we will cooperate with other parties to replace the Harper government with a better one.

There are, as Jack Layton used to say, many tools in the toolbox to do this – cooperation case-by-case and bill-by-bill; a budget accord on the model of the 2005 "NDP budget"; a governing accord in the style of the 1985 Peterson-Rae accord; or a coalition government, in the style of the coalitions that govern most of the democratic world. By talking early and often about these options, we will counteract the nonsense the Conservatives say about them; moreover, we will ensure that Canadians know that in the NDP, they have the party that is always prepared to work with others in the House of Commons to get things done –including the central task of ridding Canada of the Harper government.