

'We must preserve Canada' says former prime minister Stephen Harper during official portrait unveiling

Mark Carney also spoke at the ceremony, praising Harper's track record on fiscal policy and his championing of Canadian sovereignty abroad and in the Arctic

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Former prime minister Stephen Harper, right, at the unveiling of his official portrait during a ceremony in Ottawa, on Tuesday, Feb 3, 2026. PHOTO BY HYUNCHEOL PARK/POSTMEDIA

OTTAWA — Former prime minister Stephen Harper called for unity among politicians as his official portrait was unveiled on Parliament Hill, 20 years after winning an election that marked the beginning of almost a decade in power for the Conservatives.

“I sincerely hope that mine is just one of many portraits of prime ministers from both parties that will continue to be hung here for decades and centuries to come,” said Harper, during the unveiling ceremony, noting that political parties should come together in perilous times.

“We must preserve Canada, this country handed down to us by providence, preserved by our ancestors, and held in trust for our descendants.”

Harper thanked members of his family, his cabinet and the thousands of people who worked to implement policy during his tenure as prime minister.

Prime Minister Mark Carney also delivered remarks at the unveiling ceremony Tuesday, praising Harper’s track record on fiscal policy, his handling of the 2008 financial crisis and his championing of Canadian sovereignty abroad and in the Arctic.

“He served as prime minister of Canada for nearly a decade — the sixth-longest tenure in our history — leaving an extensive record of policy and legislative accomplishments,” said Carney.

“In a political climate increasingly buffeted by noise, he brought composure, intellect and decisiveness to public life.”

Carney added that Harper is a pragmatist and took time over the past year to provide him with advice.

Harper joked about the time Carney’s resume came across his desk in 2007, when the Bank of Canada was searching for its next governor.

“I remember thinking that the young man had promise, and I just heard there were openings at a nearby bank, so I forwarded the resume on, and low and behold, he was hired,” said Harper. “And he has apparently gone on to enjoy some success.”

Harper was first elected as prime minister in 2006, two years after he founded today’s united Conservative party. Harper led the party to two more federal election victories in 2008 and 2011.



Speaker of the Senate Raymonde Gagné, Prime Minister Mark Carney and former prime minister Stephen Harper at the unveiling ceremony for Harper's official portrait, in Ottawa on Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026. PHOTO BY HYUNGCHEOL PARK/POSTMEDIA

The painting was done by Canadian artist Phil Richards, with work beginning in 2022 and completed in 2023. Richards' previous work also includes the official Canadian Diamond Jubilee portrait of Queen Elizabeth II back in 2012.

"I consider portraiture to be a collaboration between artists and subject," said Richards. "Mr. Harper embraced the task with genuine enthusiasm."

Richards said he hopes the picture is a fitting tribute to the "most capable and respected world leaders of the 21st century."

Key political figures present at the ceremony included former prime minister Jean Chrétien, Leader of the Official Opposition Pierre Poilievre, Saskatchewan Premier

Scott Moe and Ontario Premier Doug Ford. National Hockey League Commissioner Gary Bettman was also present.

The portrait unveiling is one of three events taking place this week in Ottawa to honour Harper's legacy. On Monday, the former prime minister received a medal from the Royal Canadian Geographical Society celebrating his contributions to public service. A gala to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Harper government is scheduled to take place Wednesday evening.

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