



PEACE, ORDER & GOOD GOVERNMENT?

Hon. Jason Kenney On Government,
Civil Society, and the Common Good

CARDUS

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Civil Society, and the Common Good

With Jen Gerson, Pat Nixon, and Ray Pennings

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FOREWORD

MICHAEL VAN PELT, PRESIDENT AND CEO, CARDUS

CANADIANS HAVE QUESTIONS: big questions. Questions more enduring than the angst of a business cycle; questions greater than the ebb and flow of politics and policy; questions packing more meaning than the latest social media mania. In some ways, these questions hint at the big questions of life. Who am I? Who are we? For what purpose are we here?

These big questions show up with more intensity and immediacy when we face complex social challenges, when the issues of the front pages of the news leap into our lives and knock on our own doors. Do my fellow citizens and I have the internal resilience to chart our future with grace and dignity? Is there a community that will rally to collective action to tackle our challenges and spur us to the good life? Should I place my confidence in my country, or more specifically, in the state to wrap its cuddly arms of security around me or just grant me freedom and the justice due me?

This robust and compelling speech by the Honourable Jason Kenney prompts two questions of similar magnitude. The first: Does our 150-year Canadian federation have the vitality and durability to shape a promising future for our country? Can it endure and even flourish in our new world, with its major advances in technology and a shifting locus of direction and commitment; the present crisis of resource development and trade; the ever-increasing demands of a social welfare state and an aging population; new authorities, even those unauthorized, like social license; more complicated business structures; and, man, even the sale of beer? Does the historic idea of subsidiarity that animated and inspired our founders to distribute powers and responsibilities still have credence today?

The second question: Can our citizenry, you and I, build the vibrant institutions for tomorrow that can solve our shared challenges and mediate between the state and the individual? There are indications that we can't. Our dream of a civil society may be more fleeting today than ever before. Indications such as our willingness to love our neighbours as ourselves in the form of charitable giving is one example. The trend toward less social participation and more social isolation is another one. Deepening misunderstandings of the nature of faith and religion, our social contract, and public dialogue are other examples.

We invited the Honourable Jason Kenney to set aside his day-to-day partisan and policy tasks and briefly suspend the rough-and-tumble of

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MICHAEL VAN PELT

political life to help us tackle these questions. We invited Pat Nixon, one of Canada's most respected civil society leaders, and Jen Gerson, representing the fourth estate, journalism, to respond. My Cardus colleague Ray Pennings moderated their spirited interaction in Calgary.

It is said that when questions are no longer asked, answers are more readily given. Cardus is deeply committed to advancing these kind of questions in the public square. We aim to be one of Canada's most creative think tanks, asking questions and making arguments many others are unwilling to ask and to make. We argue that two thousand years of Christian social thought really does have something to offer us and our current challenges today. The two great directives, to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself, have brought our world and this country, Canada, some of the greatest human inventions ever: the rule of law, the distribution of powers, democratic impulses, foundational freedoms, and concern for human dignity.

The think tank, a lesser known idea in Canada than the United States, is a powerful intellectual force in this country. It harnesses the ideas of academics and intellectuals and hurls them into the public dialogue. It does so in a

way that normal human beings like you and me can engage with these ideas in real policy, regulatory, political, and cultural life.

Permit me to close on a personal note. I am the son of an immigrant. My mother and father chose, of their own free will, not pressured by persecution or political status in their mother country, to be Canadian. To this day, I am astounded by the gift they gave to me and to my family.

That said, my son, Kenton, then a fifteen-year-old boy who unexpectedly died five years ago, argued that our family had made a major mistake in judgment by not settling in Alberta. I often think about why he thought this. It was more than building fires under the Three Sisters overlooking Spray Lake. It was more than coveting powerful trucks and hard guitar strings. It was more than his rifle beneath the cot outside under the open sky.

Kenton sensed a spirit, one of generosity, one of possibility, one of endurance, a spirit of truth and clarity, and one of joy and hard work and creativity. What Kenton sensed, our country needs. It may be resisted as it surely is today, ladies and gentlemen, but it is worth the fight. Our country will become great because of it. ▲

SPEECH

HON. JASON KENNEY ON GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE COMMON GOOD

THANK YOU VERY MUCH to our hosts at Cardus and to the sponsors, and all of you for being here. Thank you for allowing us to think about some first principles together.

I must say I'm a huge fan of Cardus and the good work that it does. Some of you will likely know that Cardus was originally known as the Work Research Foundation. Its impetus, its mode of force, comes out of Dutch immigrants to Canada who brought with them a particular passion for a strong civil society, for what they call sphere sovereignty, and an incredible work ethic to boot.

Thank you for allowing the token Irishman up here to take the podium for a bit. I'm be honoured to share the podium with Jen Gerson and with Pat Nixon, a truly great Albertan who's been honoured with both the Order of Canada and the Order of Alberta of Excellence for his service to the least fortunate in our society.

I must say that after nearly two years of putting 150,000 kilometers on my Dodge Ram pickup, doing over a thousand events in every corner of the province—from La Crete with the good Mennonites up there to the Dutch reformers in Taber, from Milk River all the way over to Rocky Mountain House with Pat's son, Jason Nixon, and everywhere in between, in every range of Alberta society, and talking about current issues—I really do welcome the chance to speak about some of the first principles of our common life together.

Let me begin with the title I've been given, which is "Peace, Order, and Good Government." Of course, this is the defining theme of the *British North America Act*, Canada's original *Constitution Act*. You may be interested to know that peace, order, and good government, or POGG, was used in the British Colonies beyond Canada, in New Zealand, Australia, in South Africa, and in Ireland. It was used as a term to confer general legislative authority. But in Canada in particular it has become something more than that. It has come to typify or summarize our approach to statecraft. We read in that clause a tradition of moderation, a preference for ordered development rather than revolutionary change, and an acknowledgment that government is for the common good. We consider it a distinct advantage of our Canadian patrimony.

The phrase "peace, order, and good government" belongs in the part of our Constitution dealing with the division of powers, section 91 in particular dealing with the powers of the federal government, and

*There is a vision here that order does not mean uniformity, but rather **makes room for differences that can and must be respected.***

Basically, the Quebec Act said that Catholics could take public office. They could serve their fellow citizens and the common good *without having to disavow their faith and their deepest convictions.*

section 92 enumerating the complementary provincial powers. As you well know, disputes between the federal and provincial governments have been a mainstay of Canadian political culture and, more recently, between provinces and provinces, but I won't get into that.

I wish to suggest that sections 91 and 92 are not just a matter of technical assignation of jurisdiction. Rather I think we can read here a vision of how to work together, of how to accommodate differences and yet still, within that diversity, to have a common overarching vision. We can capture that vision of unity in diversity that characterized the United Empire Loyalists who founded English Canada at the end of the eighteenth century. There is a vision here that order does not mean uniformity, but rather makes room for differences that can and must be respected. I speak in my partisan language often of renewing the Alberta advantage, which means that we have the capacity to try something different in Alberta that we believe is advantageous for our people. Others may choose other approaches and alternative policies. That's the beauty of a federation. That is what the division of powers allows us to do, to create a series of policy laboratories to pursue our own preferences and priorities.

The Canadian constitutional vision is, therefore, I submit, one of pluralism. There is not just one state actor, but several state actors, each with its own sphere of sovereign action. Good government

is not monolithic government. Good government favours pluralism. Canada's federalism is an expression of the principle of pluralism in our constitutional order.

We should also understand how deeply this tradition of pluralism is rooted in our history. I'm concerned that we sometimes imagine our current discourse about difference and diversity is completely new or novel, that we are somehow rejecting or cutting ourselves off from our past. In fact, modern discourse about diversity is rooted in an eighteenth-century conception of pluralism, and in particular in the *Quebec Act of 1774*.

Following what our French Canadian friends called *Le Conquete*, the conquest of New France, the British Crown imposed through the Royal Proclamation of 1763 an assimilationist policy, an effort to rub out the differences in the former French colony, to marginalize the exercise of the Catholic faith, to prevent Catholics from obtaining public office, and to suppress the French civil code. This policy sought to remove all of those institutions of civil society that the church had created: The first school in North America, a result of the good works of Catholic nuns in Quebec City, Le Ursulines; the first hospital in North America founded by Catholic nuns, again, in the Quebec colony in Nouvelles-France; the first social welfare programs starting the great tradition that Pat Nixon personifies, begun by people of faith belonging to a church community.

The new British regime following the conquest saw in those institutions a threat to their dominance of North America. And so, sadly, they tried to rub those things out. They tried to create, instead of a pluralistic approach to society, a monistic approach, with an oath of allegiance not only to the sovereign, the king, but also to the king's Protestant faith, which meant excluding 90 percent of the population of what we now call Quebec.

But thanks to the enlightened advice of Guy Carleton, the British Parliament in 1774 adopted the *Quebec Act*, which was a complete reversal and was in many ways one of the most enlightened and “small-*l*” liberal expressions of British liberalism and pluralism in the history of the empire. Basically, the *Quebec Act* said that Catholics could take public office. They could be local notaries. They could be magistrates. They could serve the state. They could serve their fellow citizens and the common good without having to disavow their faith and their deepest convictions.

It said that Quebec could retain the civil code and maintain a pluralism in the legal system, with a binary system of the British common law and the French civil code. It said that all of those institutions of civil society—the university, the schools, the Catholic hospitals—could all function in cooperation with the state, and they did not have to choose between their conscience, their faith, and their ability to serve the public good.

This all happened in 1774, when in Britain itself and in its closest colonies, like where my Irish ancestors lived, the penal laws still prevailed and Catholics could not take public office and their faith was formally suppressed.

As former premier Jean Charest said about the *Quebec Act*, “Canadians made a decision very early in their history, a choice that over time has come to define the very essence of who we are. Our ancestors decided right from the start, to build a country based on the right to speak a different language, to pray in a different way, to apply a different legal system, to belong to a different culture and to enable that culture to flourish.” He went on to say, “*The Quebec Act of 1774*, passed into law more than two centuries ago, almost a hundred years before Confederation, is in this respect the most fundamental document in Canadian history. It is the foundation upon which the Canadian partnership was originally built. Its spirit defined this country from its inception. It represents one of the most enlightened decisions ever made in Canada.”

Interestingly, that very same act, because of its embrace of pluralism, was rejected by the thirteen American colonies and was one of the efficient causes of the American Revolution. It led directly to the First Continental Congress and is listed to this day in the American Declaration of Independence as “dangerous to an extreme degree to the civil rights and liberties of all



VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA



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America,” because it allowed “popery” into North America.

That has a ring of intolerance. I have to ask whether we are hearing echoes of that kind of intolerance in our political culture today. Would the same people who could not serve the common good prior to 1774 in Quebec because they would not take an oath renouncing the faith qualify today for the Canada Summer Jobs Program? Rachel Harder, MP for Lethbridge, was barred from chairing a parliamentary committee because of her convictions rooted in her faith. . . . Is her treatment a return to the sentiments that governed the northern half of North America prior to the *Quebec Act* in 1774? I’ll let you answer that question for yourself. I think, though, that these are indications that we can never take for granted the generosity of spirit of our historically grounded pluralism.

Now, I have to pause to say I’m aware that when I speak at a Cardus event, it’s obligatory to refer to the Dutch Reformed tradition of Abraham Kuyper (many good students of which I can see here), who spoke of the great notion of the spheres of sovereign action. The Dutch Reformed tradition identified with Kuyper, who was both a theologian and a prime minister, speaks of sphere sovereignty to describe that same principle of pluralism, not as a vision of government alone, but of the entire social order. It’s not enough to have the principle of pluralism reflected in the existence of multiple levels of

government. Rather, we must recognize that there are spheres of social action independent of the state. They have their own essential contribution that they make to the common good. For Kuyper, the government could only satisfy the common good on its own if it were true that all that we had in common as people was that we were subject to the same government. But no. Citizens, all of us, have many higher and priorities and duties to the community, to multiple communities, beginning with “the first community,” as Aristotle called it, the family, and to communities of faith, of commerce, of culture, of common purpose.

Another term perhaps more commonly used that describes this notion is “civil society.” Civil society addresses the bonds that people form around common missions and common goals. These societies are what constitute society writ large. Indeed, society writ large is not something that we encounter as often as the numerous societies in which we live, our families, schools, companies, faith communities, sports teams, music groups, fraternal associations, social clubs, charitable ventures. Edmund Burke famously called these “little platoons” when he said in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affection. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country, and towards a love of mankind.”

With that in mind, as the leader of a new conservative party, I'm aware, very aware, of what I think is a false caricature of how modern conservatives think about society. Namely, that creativity, initiative, and responsibility lie only and exclusively in the market, and that government is a threat to all of that. This, I believe, is a kind of thin, libertarian misconception of government as, at best, a necessary evil. This is often caricatured by reference to a distorted quotation attributed to Margaret Thatcher that "society does not exist."

That's not my vision, nor is it the vision of the renewed conservatism that I and many of my colleagues are proposing for Alberta. Our vision is not one of a great mass of individuals living between the market on the one hand and the state on the other. That vision only takes into account three aspects of society, the individual, the market, and the state. Therefore, if the market fails, the state must act, and if the state fails, individuals are left to fend for themselves. It completely leaves out all civil society does.

Now for someone in government or someone who aspires to govern, it's easy to begin with the question, What should government do and what should government not do? But I think that's the wrong question. The better question is this: What is the best way for civil society to flourish, and to in turn enable human flourishing, especially so that those who are most vulnerable are cared for? Then we can ask what the government might do to help make

that happen. To put it another way, government is at the service of, should be at the service of, a flourishing civil society. That does not mean no role for government, but it means rethinking that role.

I might point out that our host tonight, Cardus, devotes considerable energy to thinking creatively about how government policy might lift up rather than displace civil society. To take one example, their research on child-care options focuses on what parents really desire in contrast to what politicians and bureaucrats are determined to provide. I'll mention another example of recent Cardus research. They looked at the payday loan industry. I point that out because I think conservatives need to be reminded that markets too can fail to serve people well and can lead to exploitation. Policy instruments need to respond to such exploitation, especially of the vulnerable.

The research that Cardus undertakes points us in a particular way toward the contribution that communities of faith can make to our common life. I would recommend that you look at the work that they've done on the Social Cities Project, which argues persuasively that urban planning needs to take account of the institutions of civil society, particularly houses of faith. The Cardus Halo Project has tried to quantify the contribution of faith groups. (They didn't ask me for those advertisements by the way.)

Yet we know that the deepest contribution of faith groups cannot

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– Jean Charest

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be measured. It is possible to measure the value of the meals served to the poor, but that meal could be delivered in other ways. Is not the real value the social connection, the personal touch, the bond of solidarity that comes with that meal? It is not a criticism of government to say that it cannot do that, that it cannot serve a meal. It is simply an acknowledgment that we need more than government to truly flourish as human beings together.

Let me share with you a very personal example. Ray mentioned I studied at a Jesuit university in San Francisco. It happened to be in the late 1980s, during the AIDS crisis in that city. Through a friend of mine, I heard about a remarkable place that had been established by a woman we in the Catholic tradition now call St. Teresa of Calcutta, Mother Teresa. She established the first AIDS hospice in North America, the Gift of Love Hospice in South San Francisco. Through my friend, I began to volunteer there periodically and then semi-regularly on weekends, when we'd go down and do menial chores, doing the laundry and cleaning the floors, doing janitorial work, cleaning the dishes, just trying to help out these humble little nuns who Mother Teresa had flown in from India and Africa.

A few reflections about this. Now first of all, this was the first AIDS hospice in North America. It was established at the height of the crisis, when men in particular were dying by the thousands every year of a disease that people

still did not understand. At that time, HIV had not been identified. Some people still thought it was commonly contagious, and yet these nuns who grew up in some of the poorest communities on earth flew to one of the richest communities on earth to do something that no government began, and why did they do it? Well, it was summarized in the name of their home, the Gift of Love. I was transformed watching these humble, simple, often uneducated women from the Third World giving their all to men who had often been abandoned by their families and their friends, who were alienated personally and spiritually, filled with anxiety and depression and a terrible disease. I saw many of these men come to be reconciled with themselves, with their families, and spiritually reconciled as well, not through any kind of proselytization, but simply with the witness of completely transformative, unconditional love. There is no government program and nothing in the market that can be a substitute for that love and what I witnessed. It changed me.

What compelled Mother Teresa to establish that place—not in moral judgment of what lives those guys might've led but with unconditional love for them? What moved those young nuns from India and Africa to join her in that work? It was simply this: As Mother Teresa said: "I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve him,

because I love Jesus.” The simplicity of a mission of love. I suspect an AIDS hospice like that would not receive Canada Summer Jobs Program funding today.

By the way, a little interesting Alberta note, did you know that Mother Teresa, St. Teresa, visited St. Paul, Alberta, in 1984, just three years before I ended up down there in San Francisco? The local community raised some money to help her work abroad, and so she returned their favour with a visit. They said that there were particular needs in the community with our First Nations people who were living in poverty and alienation. She ordered three of the nuns who were travelling with her to stay behind in St. Paul, Alberta. They still have a home there that cares for the aboriginal community in St. Paul.

Let me give you some other personal experiences of how people moved by faith have done so much to allow for human flourishing in our pluralistic society. In 1978, the world saw the crisis of the Indo-Chinese boat people fleeing Communist Vietnam by the hundreds of thousands. Tens of thousands died in the high seas. Piracy, unsafe marine passage, and Canadians were moved deeply. The government didn't have the capacity on its own to resettle large numbers of people. They just didn't.

It was faith communities, local congregations of every tradition, that stepped up to the plate and said that something must be done to help these people who

were dying as refugees. Through their initiative, a great former immigration minister, Ron Atkey, responded by creating what we now call the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. If those local churches raised enough money to cover the costs, and if they undertook to provide settlement and integration support to those families, the government would approve their resettlement to Canada. In nine months, we welcomed sixty thousand Indo-Chinese Vietnamese boat people as new Canadians. They've gone on to flourish in every area of Canadian society.

I was proud as immigration minister to expand the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. It's a perfect example of what I'm talking about: the power of civil society to produce good social outcomes versus overly bureaucratic programs. Government goes and interviews people. Then the United Nations tells us where to select from, and they refer cases to us and they go through the bureaucratic system. They come to Canada. They're put in public housing units, often away from employment, often in what become de facto ghettos. Often these people have no English- or French-language proficiency, and they're left without employment. They're left on their own. This has created huge social challenges in parts of urban Canada and elsewhere.

But the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program opened up the doors to twenty-five thousand Middle Eastern ethnic and



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religious minorities, many of them Christians facing genocide in their home countries. They were brought to Canada and settled here by faith communities who enveloped them with love and with true charity. The outcomes with those people, I can tell you: the data is very clear. The refugees resettled through the private sponsorship program and civil society have remarkably higher levels of income and employment and education outcomes than those who come through the bureaucratic government program.

Another example of a better kind of partnership is the International Day Against Homophobia. I can mention one program I established that initially involved only government action. But then I invited groups in the gay community to partner with us to resettle gay Iranians who were facing potential execution in their country of origin. I went to eastern Turkey to meet with these men who were living underground facing persecution and helped to set up a discreet program to resettle hundreds of them to safety and freedom here in Canada.

Another good example of the power of partnership and civil society is Pat Nixon and the Mustard Seed. He's going to share that with us, I'm sure, but this is something he started in a basement that flourished into one of the largest social agencies in this province. Through Pat and Mustard Seed's work hundreds of lives have been saved and restored by the same kind

of spiritual vision that motivated Mother Teresa.

I'm not here this evening to announce new policies in child care or payday loans or any other subject. I've just come from a party convention where we're working on how to flesh these ideas out into a platform. I will look at taking the common good ideas that Cardus has brought forward. But now is a good time for all Canadians to think about first principles.

Let me add one other reflection on tonight's theme of peace, order, and good government. Some wrongly believe this idea is a recipe for an authoritarian, meddling, or all-supervising government, especially from a federal government. But as one of our great constitutional scholars, Donald Creighton, demonstrated in his 1939 submission to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, the phrase "peace, order, and good government" encompassed not merely the limited modern idea of government as the state, but also of good governance, which includes the healthy division of responsibilities between the state and civil society, the latter of which has an important, even essential, role to play in a well functioning, well-ordered society.

Creighton concluded that "good government referred to good public administration, on the one hand, but also had echoes of what we now talk of as good governance, which incorporates the

notion of appropriate self-governance by civil-society actors, since one element of good government was thought to be its limitation to its appropriate sphere of responsibility.” As Edmund Burke observed, “Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more of it there will be without.”

Good self-government through a robust and active civil society is the form of good government most compatible with individual liberty and human flourishing. The stronger these institutions are, the freer the people. They create habits of self-discipline and organic order. When they disappear either through neglect or deliberate undermining, their role is replaced by the less feeling and often more callous hand of the state, which is by turns neglectful and over-generous, insensitive and unresponsive, as a distant authority must be.

The removal of local responsibility and the dismantling or withering of civil society mean the end of the practice of self-government by free men and women. We lose the habit and the ability to organize our society ourselves. The form of democracy is retained in the casting of one vote among millions, but the habits of a democratic people, the true spirit of democracy, of rule by the people, for the people, and of the people as Lincoln wrote is lost. To restore the constitutional promise of good government, we

must restore local government and individual self-government.

As Michael Novak wrote in his brilliant *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, which had a huge influence on me: “Human flourishing requires at least liberty from torture and tyranny in the political order, liberty from the prison of poverty and hunger in the economic order, and in the civic, cultural and moral order, liberties of conscience, thought, word, inquiry, science, the arts and association. A free society consists of three independent systems, the political, the economic and the moral, each aimed at securing one of these kinds of natural liberties.”

To close with a last reflection, peace, order, and good government is often characterized as being a kind of mundane constitutional vision as compared to the US Declaration’s, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But that’s not the end of the story, because in 1982 when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Parliament adopted the *New Constitution Act*, they wrote into it a new preamble, that Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law. I think this is a transcendent vision, not a mundane one. It is a vision that motivates millions of Canadians to do good every day, urged by the promptings of their heart to serve God by serving their neighbours. Let us honor those Canadians, not marginalize them. Thank you very much. ^



THE HON. JASON KENNEY

is the leader of the United Conservative Party in Alberta and was the last leader of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta. He was a Member of Parliament from 1997–2106 and during this time served as the Minister for Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Minister of Employment and Social Development, and the Minister of National Defense.

Kenney currently resides in Calgary, Alberta.

DISCUSSION

RAY PENNINGS, MODERATOR

Co-Founder and Executive Vice-President of Cardus

HON. JASON KENNEY

Leader of the United Conservative Party of Alberta

JEN GERSON

Journalist-in-Residence, University of Calgary

PATRICK R. NIXON, AOE, CM

Executive Director of Oxford House

RAY PENNINGS: Thank you very much, Jason, for your speech. We have a lot there to engage. Pat, I'm going to start with you. You've had a distinguished forty-year career in civil society, as a community and institution leader, those little platoons that Jason talked about. Looking back, how has Canadian civil society evolved? Is it stronger than it used to be? Where are some of the tension points? Just an introductory reflection from your particular perch.

PAT NIXON: Forty years ago I was on the street trying my best to bum some money in order to put some more alcohol in my system. I was fortunate enough to have four men come walking down that street. I thought they were going to punch my lights out, but when they got close I said, "You know, I'm kind of hungry. Think you could give me some money for something to eat?" And they said, "No, we won't give you any money. We'll buy you something to eat." That was my first experience with what I would call "civil society." The common good was very real to me that day, and it never ended there.

When I found out that they were people from a church, I thought, "Oh, no. They're probably going to make me pray and do something that I don't understand." To make a long story short, what they did is they took me home. They didn't give me a garage, which would have been an upgrade in my life. They actually gave me a bedroom and they gave me a pillow and they fed me. The next morning, they encouraged me to take a shower. One of them cut the mats out of my hair. Looking back, they gave me a chance to be able to have a life again.

When you talk about the common good, this is the common good in all practicality. It's what we need to preserve. Speaking on behalf of people of faith, we have a responsibility to worship God through

love and kindness in whatever community that we're in.

PENNINGS: Jen, you're here on behalf of the media. It's a lot easier covering government than it is civil society. Can you give us a journalist's perspective on why the media often has a hard time capturing these things and communicating them.

JEN GERSON: The first issue is that the media doesn't tend to like good news stories. In journalism school, the first day of class, we're told, "If it bleeds, it leads." It's an old-fashioned phrase that means the things that are ugly and violent make the top of the news.

That is not to say that we don't cover good news stories; often we do. However, when we cover a news story, typically we would want it to fit into some kind of broader narrative or larger story. So, for example, one type of good news story that I think the media did cover quite a lot was Syrian refugees being resettled through civil society. That got a lot of coverage. Why was that? It fit into broader stories about what was happening with the Syrian war and the refugee program. The majority of the media focused on the Syrian refugees, and not many stories focused on the Yazidi refugees. I think there was a reason for that, right?

JASON KENNEY: And I couldn't get any coverage of my Iraqi refugees or my Iranians.

GERSON: The broader global story about Christian persecution is not really at the forefront of the narrative right now. And we can have an argument about whether that should be, but that's just the reality; that's not a decision being made by one single force. I would go further and say the media's not doing so well. The media is struggling on the whole. The number of journalists even here in Alberta has dramatically dropped off, even since I came here ten years ago. With limited resources, I think most journalists see covering government as our primary role; it's not necessarily our primary role to cover civil society. So, if we just don't have the bodies to cover it, then it will get lost.

PENNINGS: Jason, critics of civil-society policy ideas often say that one of the challenges is an inherent inequality. Whereas a government program deals with every citizen and has a responsibility to every citizen in an equal way, civil society has groups here and there. Not everyone is included. People fall through the cracks. How can government and civil society work together so goods can be shared by all Canadians and not just by those with social ties, say to a church community, for example? There are many today who don't have that. Twelve percent of people attended a place of worship in the last seven days. It means 88 percent did not.



PAT NIXON



JEN GERSON

KENNEY: Regarding equality, at the extreme, powerful states motivated by achieving equality have been tried repeatedly in modern history and have been a catastrophic failure. If omnipotent states focused on redistribution and equality, prevented people from falling between the cracks, then we would have seen great prosperity and human flourishing in the Soviet Union or in today's Cuba or in any of those systems characterized by that philosophy. We tried that, we got the T-shirt, and it was not a success. I think it was very clear in my remarks, there is a role for the state to help with human flourishing. The state can do certain things more efficiently than civil society. But ultimately, you can't touch the heart of people in the ways that people like Pat Nixon have done. If I'm not mistaken, Pat, you very purposefully refused to accept government funding for your program. You took some maybe for infrastructure, but you didn't want strings attached to change the way that you approached it.

NIXON: Well, we did get some government funding in the end for what we were doing, but the teeter-totter was very solid on the private side in order to give our neighbours an opportunity to be good neighbours. One of the things that we've seen over the years is that the fences in our communities have gotten taller and taller. We've become more private people and

there's an indifference. I don't know about you, but I drive home, I drive into my garage, I go into my house. When I leave, I get into my car, I open my garage, and sometimes, especially in the winter, I don't even speak to my neighbour for that whole period of time.

When we think of the church in the community in the past, we saw the steeple in the middle of a community and we knew it was the centre of a community and it actually knocked down those fences. But more and more that steeple has been knocked down, and knocked down, and we've been less and less able to get to know our neighbour. That was a real part of our social fabric, how we cared for neighbours, even child welfare. If I had trouble with my dad sixty-seven years ago, I'd walk out the back gate, take a left at the apple tree, and go see my Uncle Frank and say, "Dad's really frustrating me, I don't know what to do" and he'd give me a little advice and help me figure out what to do with my troubles.

Family units were closer together, fences were designed to keep the dog in as opposed to keep your neighbour out in privacy so you could have a barbecue all by yourself. We have to figure out how we're gonna knock down those fences that actually cause indifference in our community. I think government can play a part in helping us with

that, but ultimately, we need to take responsibility for it.

PENNINGS: Pat just described the positive side, the role of strong families and also the negative side, with today's social isolation. Studies today link that kind of social isolation and a lack of meaningful connections to mental health issues and some major public health concerns, and even economic challenges. Jen, as you poke around with your journalistic lens, where do you see signs of hope?

GERSON: I'm the wrong person to ask on this panel for signs of hope. I am the anti-hope person on this panel. When we talk about social isolation, I see parallels between that (a decline in church attendance and social isolation), and a concurrent decline in trust in the media, right? The resulting atomization of communities and individuals in the social sphere is mirrored in the ideological silos and polarization of our media outlets. Not only do we go into our own garages and not talk to our neighbours, but now we're not even sharing the same newspaper. We go to our own individual websites that cater to our particular ideological interests, that only furthers that breakdown. I don't think that those are correlations, I think that those are parallel issues. But I think they have a similar cause, and that is the decline in the influence of institutions, right?

If people have lost trust in mainstream media to deliver them the news, they've also lost trust in the church to be the single arbiter of the moral good in society, right? That's the breakdown that we're starting to see. Hope? On the media side, I think that we're going through a period of transition. I think there is going to be an end to the tunnel, but I think it's going to be a generation coming. I think there are going to be broader consequences for society as a result of that breakdown.

When we were talking about this panel beforehand, I was like, "Just so you're clear, I'm an atheist." I'm not really part of this tribe, and I'm maybe not the right person to be here, and you're like, "No, no that's good, be an atheist, that's good." But I would describe myself as a bad atheist or a poor atheist. The reason why is this; this is the stumbling block that I really hit upon: The role of civil society and the role of church seem to have this salutary effect on societies. They seem to create communities that stay together and help one another. And how do societies flourish absent that? As an atheist, I don't have an answer. That's what I'm thinking through. I don't see the state as a replacement for that. I think that the state would be really bad at that. I also don't see my fellow atheists stepping up to the plate to create secular versions of this. I see people my own age losing trust

Civil society and the church seem to have this salutary effect on societies. They seem to create communities that stay together and help one another. And how do societies flourish absent that? As an atheist, I don't have an answer.

– Jen Gerson



JASON KENNEY

in the church to be arbiters of the moral good. What are you left with? Well, you're left with being alone in your house with your TV.

KENNEY: This is where you throw in the obligatory reference to Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* and his important work as one of America's leading sociologists on what he termed "social capital." He associated that very closely with levels of religious observance and practice. I do have a sign of hope: immigration. I was on the playing field of immigration for five years as a minister and ten years as a multiculturalism minister in the government. The highest levels of religious observance, and I believe the thickest social capital in Canada, are found in communities of new Canadians. Sometimes they are in cultural silos as they become more integrated into Canadian society.

That may be a good thing, actually, because they preserve those reciprocal loyalties from their countries and cultures of origin. Often their faith is central to that. They take care of the widows and orphans. You can go to any Sikh temple or gurdwara and 24/7 there is a free kitchen. Like a "soup kitchen," it is called a "langar," operating in the house of worship. This is an example of the social capital motivated by faith that is being renewed because of immigration.

PENNINGS: That highlights, Jason, one of the often unseen contributions of just one of Canada's diverse faith communities, the Sikh community. It also takes us to the pluralism question you raised in your speech. Those good works that benefit society and the common good come out of the particular religious commitments and ways of life these communities contribute to this country. As the examples from your speech showed, those contributions are public as well as private. They also represent real differences of conviction and belief between Canadians. We don't like to emphasize that side, the disagreement. And the challenge of pluralism is that we have to find ways of living with our differences, especially deep ones. You appealed in your talk back to the *Quebec Act of 1774* and contrasted the Canadian history of pluralism with that south of the border. How do we reach a sense of a common good when we have very diverse communities and also a lot of isolated individuals? Who's job is that? Where does that come from?

KENNEY: Well, I'll answer this by rejecting the claim of my friend, Prime Minister Trudeau, that Canada has no core identity, no core values, and is a post-national state. I don't believe we are just some random collection of individuals. That's a depressing, atomized conception of society in

my opinion. No! The reason immigrants want to come here and stay is because they find in this country something very valuable, habits of life, a social order, the rule of law, equality of opportunities. These things did not happen by accident. They are grounded in our institutions and our history. How do we reinforce that? How about by teaching it in our schools? How about teaching the next generation about this inheritance? How about instead of saying that the history of the formation of Canada is one primarily of rejecting colonialism and it's all terrible injustice in the past, how about teaching the enlightened idea of the *Quebec Act* and how it shaped the development of Canadian pluralism? So, I'm not talking about some dumb, jingoistic nationalism, but a modicum of civic literacy in our schools as a grounding of common identity.

PENNINGS: Patrick, in his speech, Jason said that organizations like the Mustard Seed can do things that government can't do to help people. Many of the people you served most closely knew the pain of human brokenness first-hand. Broken families, broken lives, failing institutions. Bad choices and also bad circumstances. There are two sides to dealing with that. One is the love and compassion and the hugs and all of the support that is provided. On the other hand, there's still a vacuum in terms of an

understanding of a moral order and a good. Somewhere that has to be created. Do you have any thoughts in the midst of all of the brokenness where we are today? How do we recover an aspirational sense of the common good as citizens together?

NIXON: Let's go back to liberty. We talked about liberty. I thought that was a fantastic word. I think whenever we have liberty, we have power. Both come together. People without liberty have no power. It's taken away from them. I'm a father of six sons. Every time one of them was born, I would pick him up, put him in my arms, and say to myself, "I'm gonna provide and I'm gonna protect this child." Another thing that I found myself saying over time was, "I want to give them purpose and prestige."

When we're working with people who are coming out of those vulnerable spots in life, it's easy to say, "Okay, I'm gonna feed you, I'm gonna provide for you, I'm gonna protect you by giving you a warm place to be." But you also say, "Come on. I have hope for you. I believe that you can stand up and walk. And I want to walk with you." That's a purpose, to say that there's a vision and opportunity for them to claim. "Here's prestige, you can stand tall instead of having shame anymore." I think that all of us, no matter where we are, in government, in the bureaucracy,

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or if we're neighbour-to-neighbour, or in the media, we have an opportunity to help each other grab a sense of vision for our country, of what civil society is about.

When I started Mustard Seed, I did not have a clue what I was doing. Not a clue. They said, "Will you start this little street ministry in Calgary?" And I went, "Okay, I have nothing else to do." So I walked downtown and I found twelve street people. I sat them down, people I knew quite well, and I said to them, "This church over here is asking me to come over there and start this thing, do you want to help me?" They went, "Yeah, we got nothing else to do!" And we all went down there and we started a place that eventually reached out to over one thousand people a day and eleven thousand volunteers. It started because we gave people opportunity. When we communicate a need in church, I'm amazed at how quickly they say, "Hey, what can I do?" I think that we need to open up those lines of communication again to say, "Let's talk about this, and see how we can help."

So, right now I think we've come to the point we allow bureaucracy to actually care for everything. I'm not against social workers doing their job. We need their help to figure out how to build community. But I really believe that we need to give this back to society. I feel like the care of each

other is far more effective when we're doing it that way.

PENNINGS: So, this has consequences for individuals and for all the institutions we talked about. Yuval Levin from Washington, DC, wrote a book two years ago called *The Fractured Republic*. He highlights that a liberal society as we have it today requires a certain set of virtues that historically have been created in illiberal institutions, like families and churches.

KENNEY: I was quoting Michael Novak in my speech making a similar point.

PENNINGS: Jen, you've been very open about your own faith perspective as an atheist in terms of how you see the world. In your view, does the decline of virtue and civil society actually threaten democracy itself? Where do we get our virtue from for democracy to continue?

GERSON: I think that's a big question and I think it would be a long answer. Where do we get our virtue from? I do I think it's a threat to democracy, the decline of civil society. Yes, if you look at any rise of any totalitarian regime, that's one of the first things they do. They destroy civil society. That's not a coincidence. Or they co-op civil society and bring it into the political party apparatus. So, when you start to see a decline of civil society, that's a warning sign.

I would say there is a growing vision about a unified Canadian virtue. My concern is that it's in a liberal vision. One of the things I'm noticing especially about social media—and don't get me started on Twitter and how much I hate that. But one of the things that I get concerned about is that when the civil sphere abandons the moral sphere, what entity takes it up? Well, the state takes it up, and that means that debates about policy cease to be good-natured, good-willed debates between people who disagree on an outcome or an objective.

We can't just have a debate anymore about whether the tax rate should be 10 or 12 or 20 percent. Now these become moral issues. You want to know something that started to circulate on Twitter the other day that freaked me right out? It was a tweet gaining popularity that said that the use of the word "taxpayer" was racist. Why? Listen to the chain of logic. Because using the word "taxpayer" is tapping into notions of "white grievance." Complex debates are magically made simple through politically correct ideology. How do you have a policy debate with someone who thinks that reducing taxpayers' taxes is racist? Where do you even begin? You can't have a civil debate or disagreement anymore, because for me to disagree with you is heresy.

KENNEY: That says it all.

GERSON: Even within my own journalistic sphere, we can't have a debate anymore. I can't be like, "Hey, you know, let's consider Doug Ford. Let's think of the pros and cons of Doug Ford." No, because if you even consider Doug Ford, you're a racist. That's where this is going, and I don't see how you have a democratic society when that is how starkly the lines are drawn.

KENNEY: Isn't this particularly true in university culture now? Everybody is aware of Dr. Suzuki getting his honorary doctorate from University of Alberta, but what you may not have heard is in the same tranche of honorary degree recipients are Helen Clark, the former Socialist Labor Prime Minister in New Zealand; Roger Penner, the former NDP Leader in Alberta; and Nettie Wiebe, the former International Farmers Union President and four time NDP candidate. I'm sure all very good worthwhile recipients. But when you have everyone receiving an honorary degree from a prestigious university all being from the political left, nobody from the centre, centre-right, or any other perspective, does that really reflect the contemporary virtue of diversity? Could we please also have a diversity that includes some diversity of thought and opinion?

GERSON: I would push back a little. I'm not entirely sure that universities matter enough for



that to be much of an influence. Increasingly, universities are just credentialing institutions. That's all they are now. I don't think that universities actually foster debate or thought at all. So I'm not sure that they're significant enough anymore.

PENNINGS: The clock is one of those non-fake-news things that truly exists. And we have sadly reached the end of our time. So let me ask each of you for a final reflection, a final word. Is there's a question you would like people to think about as we conclude? Pat?

NIXON: Communication is really important. We're talking about the government and the front line of caring for community. We do have this bureaucracy in the middle that can block the communication flowing back and forth. I think that we need politicians, MLAs, and MPs who are willing to come to the front line and listen and talk together. I had that experience over the years. Ralph Klein would come to my office and say, "Pat, what's this all about?" And off we'd have a chit-chat. We would not always agree, but we had the chance to talk. I think coming to the front line did influence some of the decisions he made. So I would just really encourage people in all positions of authority to knock down the walls and come meet us in those places where we are trying to care for one another.

GERSON: I think many of the challenges we discussed revolve around a loss of trust and credibility. Whether it is the government, the media, or the church, we seem to be, as a society, going through this transition where we have a massive breakdown of trust and credibility. I don't know how to begin to address that, much less rebuild it. But I think the transition is going to be a generation coming. How did we lose trust? How did that happen and why? How do we find ways to reconnect with people and rebuild that trust? Because I think that's the core bedrock of many of these problems.

KENNEY: Ditto. I would just, in closing, emphasize the importance of education. I referred to this before you asked, "How do we find some common grounding on our increasingly atomized post-modern society?" And I said, "Well, how about we teach a bit of civics?" I did that as Minister of Immigration and Citizenship. I looked at how new citizens are supposed to demonstrate to the government a basic knowledge of Canada. When I became minister, I discovered there was this test that was ridiculously thin and included virtually nothing of our history or political institutions. So, we thickened that up, we were ambitious for them to integrate, to be proud of this country, to understand better where their institutions, where the prosperity we've created, where it has all come from.

Some of the bureaucrats said to me, “Oh, you’re getting to a level that many new Canadians won’t understand.” And I said, “Rubbish.” People are eager to learn and to become Canadian. So, we upgraded the content and the difficulty of the test. Eighty-five percent pass on the first try. And the rest, they go back and study a little bit more. We actually raised the bar on civic literacy. Now new Canadians know more about Canada than some kids finishing high school.

So, I think one critical thing we could do is to present the vision of good government and our tradition of pluralism. To be honest about the tragedies of residential schools involving churches, but also the successes of

the first schools and hospitals being founded by people of faith as well. How about a balanced and robust presentation of our history and identity? And let’s begin re-connecting the next generation with a shared sense of Canadian identity.

PENNINGS: Every journey begins with a first step. And tonight isn’t going to suddenly transform everything. But I think the conversation we have just had between three leaders from different institutions does show that civil conversation is still possible. It’s possible to push beyond the headlines and be frank and candid. For that, we thank each of you for sharing with us and for being with us this evening. ^



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–Jason Kenney



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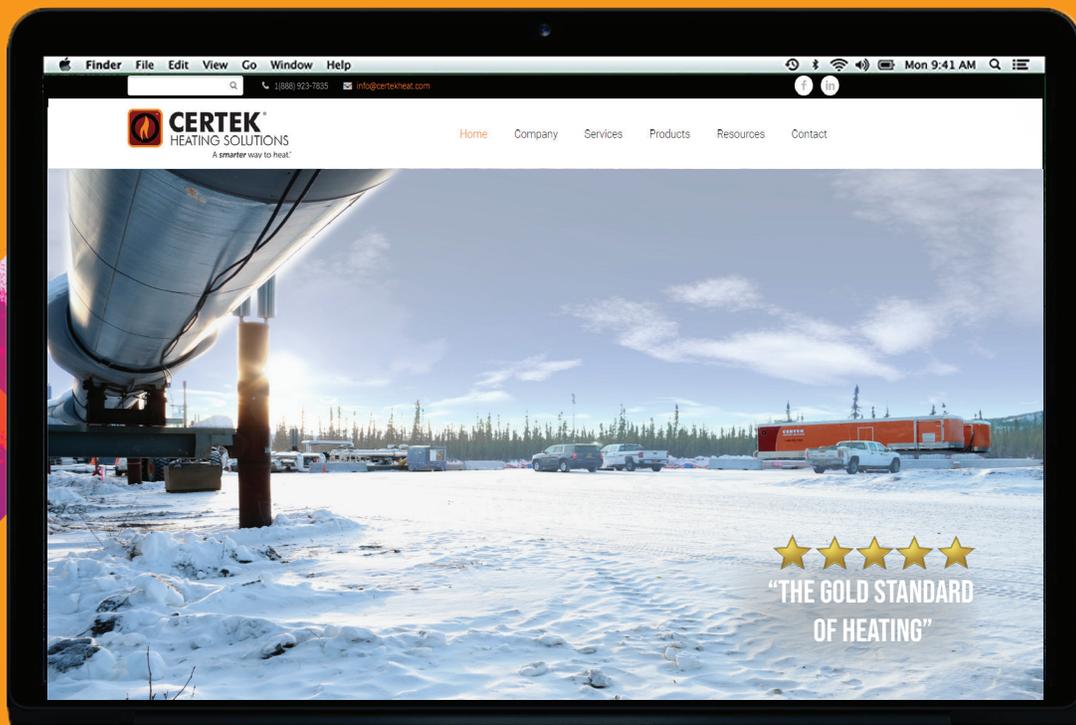
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