



After a somewhat contentious presidential election in February that saw the victory of René Prével, Haitians went to the polls again on April 21 to elect a parliament. **Edmonton East Member of Parliament Peter Goldring** represented the government of Canada with a special Foreign Affairs Canada election monitoring mission that was sent to Haiti to assist in Haiti's continued democratic growth. Despite less than perfect voter turn out, the elections were free of obvious violence and political acrimony. They looked every bit as democratic as a parliamentary election in Canada, where some voters also forget the intrinsic value of casting a ballot. Mr. Goldring shares his thoughts and observations here

Arriving in Haiti on April 21 to help monitor the parliamentary elections, I was well aware the previous presidential election of Feb. 12 had not gone smoothly; there had been much debate about the election returns. After initially being ahead with 61 per cent of the vote, René Prével's lead shrunk to 49 per cent and once again Haiti was subject to loud demonstrations, burning tires on the streets and accusations of electoral fraud. The confusion that accompanied the elections, and the perception of some impropriety, plagued the results and suggested that Haiti had not yet transitioned to full democracy.



MP Peter Goldring attended Election Central Monitoring location with Jean-Pierre Kingsley of Elections Canada who has directed all operations.

While that election has been criticized by some, I was still impressed by the response of the Caribbean community to ensure that things were finalized properly and that an end result was attained. Almost immediately, nearby nations like Brazil offered their help in determining whether ballots had been lost, stolen or destroyed. Ultimately, along with Brazilian diplomats, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and the ambassadors from Canada, Chile and the United States decided to recalculate and divide 85,000 blank ballots that had been recorded in the initial vote count and credit all contenders in proportion to the actual votes they received individually. Accord-



ingly, Préval was elected president of Haiti with 51 per cent of the vote. That result has not been questioned by the world community and has certainly been accepted by the Haitian people themselves, who, as I witnessed during my time there, are very enthused about President-elect Préval's opportunities.

Analyzing the political environment in Haiti, I believe that Haiti's positive future will be determined by several factors: A nation with a stable and effective democ-



MP Peter Goldring on right at early morning opening of poll station with U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson on left and Dominican Republic Ambassador José Ramia in the centre.

cratic government and a nation confident in its security and judiciary will surely lead to economic growth and prosperity. Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, must be allowed time to develop and mature as a democracy. Due to chronic authoritarian governments, it has had precious little of that time to do so in the 202 years since it achieved independence from the French after a revolt in 1804. Perhaps that is why the world community should give this island nation sufficient time to adjust to democratic conditions and fairness that many nations in the world have taken for granted.

Haiti is a beautiful country with so much potential but with little historically of the na-

tional stability necessary to achieve it. Its people welcome jobs at wages that would have seemed exploitive in Depression-era Canada because there are no other alternatives. Haiti now attracts low cost labor industry. As an example, a plant closed in nearby Honduras moved its production to Haiti because labor is less costly. Security and stable government will be keys to bringing prosperity to Haiti.

As a member of a Foreign Affairs Canada delegation that included New Democratic Party Foreign Affairs Critic Alexa McDonough and Bloc MP Thierry St. Cyr, I was honoured to represent the new Conservative government on this election monitoring mission but perhaps even more honoured to play a small role in the growth of democracy that this government stands behind. My first observations of the country confirmed what I had suspected: the paramount importance of security and the need for Haitians to develop a quality of life and economic opportunity that will foster greater political stability.

I believe that security is still a major problem in Haiti, with gang violence so evident. While in Haiti, we traveled everywhere in armoured vehicles with armed officers and



we were told to we couldn't travel to the "red zone," the Cité Soleil section of capital Port-au-Prince, because it was too dangerous. In the past, gangs have been known to kidnap as many as 30 people in one day for ransoms.

My perception was that most Haitians are happy with Préval's election – they see him as a reformer, a democrat and sympathetic for the plight of the average entry factory worker, lucky enough to have a job, who receives about \$2 (CAN) a day and often works a 70 hour

week in order to make a little extra overtime salary. An experienced worker on quota work can make \$4 a day.

With the voter turn out for the parliamentary election was only slightly over 30 per cent, I felt a sense of optimism beginning to pervade this country. While Haitians were not voting in great numbers for the Members of Parliament, it was not because they felt that their vote did not count or that democracy did not matter. They had just elected a new president and this parliamentary election was just not perceived to be as important, which underscores the belief held that most Haitians are not clearly understanding the roles and

benefits to society of Parliament.

Of note was that this election was conducted without acrimony. All told, it was a very successful parliamentary election that was accepted wholesale by Haitians and is

an important step in the democratic process. Haitians are also anxiously awaiting a visit by Canadian Governor General Michaëlle Jean next month, when she attends the inauguration of newly elected Haitian President René Préval. It will be a unique homecoming for Canada's head of state, as

she returns to the country of her birth.

It is difficult to know when a country like Haiti has turned the corner from chronic instability to the democratic and economic norm. Certainly, you will eventually see it in facts in figures, in successful long-term government, in solid economic indicators like a rising standard of living and reduced poverty. Perhaps you see it first in the faces of the people – when they can begin to smile and start to think optimistically about the future – for themselves, their families and their country.

For all armchair critics who say that turn out could have been higher, I say that



Polling station in Port au Prince showing a good turnout but with UN security vehicle in foreground giving security throughout Haiti

most Haitians, and others like myself, view the issues as being the glass is half-full, not half-empty. While there is much left to do in a possibly long road to Haiti's self-sustainability, this election is a good step forward.



MP Peter Goldring on the right with (from left to right) Bloc Québécois M.P. Thierry St-Cyr, Haiti's interim Prime Minister Gerald Latortue and New Democrat M.P. Alexa McDonough.

**Update:** Haiti and the international community have built the foundation of democracy. We must wait for the rest of the house to be built. Freedom often takes time to take root, but when it does, it will blossom with the promise of freedom and stability for tomorrow. Haiti is busy today building that future.

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

**Question #1** Should Canada's monetary aid be more focused on security and the rebuilding of education infrastructure in countries like Haiti?

Yes       No

**Question #2** Should Canada work more closely with CARICOM in establishing a functional democratic society in Haiti?

Yes       No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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