

## My meeting with Michael

**By Bill Phillips**

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I had the pleasure of meeting, and chatting briefly, with deputy Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff on the weekend.

My first impression was that he's not as tall in person as he appears to be on television. He's not short, but he's not tall either. I know, that's not what we should gauge our political leaders by, but first impressions are important.

My other first impression was that he is much more personable in person (if that makes sense), but somewhat stiff and almost uncomfortable when speaking in front of a group. I contrast that to former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney who was as stiff and aloof in person (at least to reporters) as he seemed on television.

In person Ignatieff was engaging, likeable and a good politician. He was trying to get as much information out of me as I was trying to get out of him.

As for his speech to a group of Black Press editors and reporters, I generally liked what he had to say.

However, there was one main part of his speech that I found particularly distasteful. He started by hammering the Conservatives, not that I found that particularly distasteful, but it was the words he chose. He criticized the Conservatives for attacking and trying to dismantle a Canadian institution – namely the Liberal Party of Canada.

Sure, the Liberals have been around since Confederation, but I wouldn't classify them as a Canadian institution. Certainly no more so than the Conservative Party.

There is an arrogance with some Liberals in that they feel the party is the natural governing party of Canada. It has certainly spent more time governing than not, but that does not mean it has a right to govern. Ignatieff's comments indicated he hasn't quite grasped that fact, something all Liberals should have recognized after the last election.

Where Ignatieff did shine, however, was in being critical of the Conservatives' inaction on the mountain pine beetle. He said it's time to start the promised \$1 billion in aid flowing. And, taking a page from provincial forest critic Bob Simpson, said there is more to dealing with this than simply cutting down the trees that are dead. Ignatieff didn't use the term 'forest health' but he did speak about the pine beetle being a larger issue than just bugs.

He said the Conservatives haven't put enough money into researching the mountain pine beetle. I also got a little bit of a chuckle out of this. He's right of course, except that when Paul Martin was in power the only money the Liberals announced for the mountain pine beetle was research money – nothing to help those affected on the ground or try to stem the tide of the attack when perhaps there was something that

could have been done. The Conservatives have at least announced money, even if they haven't delivered it. No wonder people get jaded when it comes to politics.

The other interesting thing about Ignatieff's pine beetle comments was that he put the epidemic squarely on the shoulders of climate change. If we think that climate change is something that is happening somewhere else and affecting somewhere else, we shouldn't. It's not a stretch. The mountain pine beetle is allowed to flourish because we don't have cold winters anymore. That's climate change.

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