

Harper's drug crackdown could cut funds for safe-injection site

Vancouver Sun

Monday, December 5, 2005

Page: A4

Section: News

Byline: Allan Woods, with files from Ian Bailey and Fiona Anderson

Source: CanWest News Service

Conservative leader Stephen Harper has vowed to crack down on drugs by imposing stiffer penalties, halting the decriminalization of marijuana and throwing doubt on Vancouver's safe injection site experiment.

"We as a government will not use taxpayers' money to fund drug use," Harper said in Burnaby Saturday. "That is not the strategy we will pursue."

Clay Adams, director of communications with Vancouver Coastal Health, refused to speculate on whether the site, called Insite, would be closed but said he wasn't surprised by the statement. "What we're seeing here is a not-surprising position from [the Conservative] party that favours more of an enforcement approach to illegal drug use and of course the injection site is based on a harm-reduction approach," Adams said.

The Conservative Party's anti-drug campaign proposes mandatory minimum sentences of two years for trafficking hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine or crystal meth. The same penalties would apply to large amounts of marijuana or hashish. Fines for trafficking or producing drugs would be increased to "reflect the street value" and would escalate for repeat offenders.

Harper would also eliminate conditional sentences, scrap plans to decriminalize marijuana and introduce a national drug strategy aimed at youth.

"I don't think it's a coincidence that we have seen a rapid expansion of the drug trade since this government first tabled its marijuana decriminalization legislation," Harper said. "It sent a signal to society, to police officers and to the drug industry that they were simply not serious about enforcing drug laws. Some people want to deal with the problem by simply surrendering."

Instead, he said the federal government must send a clear message that the proliferation of illegal drugs is unacceptable.

"Our values are under attack," he told reporters, adding that ensuring a peaceful and safe society is "a value that none of the other parties seem to care about."

Harper criticized former Vancouver mayor Larry Campbell's soft stance on drugs.

"Campbell said the idea of a crystal meth crisis in our communities is garbage," Harper said. "I think [voters] are going to have to ask themselves, and I think they are asking themselves in this community what was Larry Campbell's record on that and what happened in Vancouver during that period. I think the voters of Vancouver cast their judgment on that with Mr. Campbell's party in the recent elections."

Campbell said Saturday that Harper had misconstrued his comments, which were that while crystal methamphetamine was a problem, there was no evidence of an "epidemic."

In an interview with a Vancouver radio station Saturday morning, Harper sparked interest with comments that he would seek out and use private health care if his wife was forced to wait upwards of 18 months for a hip replacement under the public health-care system.

"Well, I'll just say that as a father and a husband you will do whatever you need to do to take care of your family," he said.

awoods@cns.canwest.com

Idnumber: 200512050138

Edition: Final

Story Type: News

Length: 485 words

Keywords: DRUGS; CRIME; ELECTIONS; CAMPAIGNS; POLITICAL PARTIES; POLITICIANS; CANADA