

Parrish's apology still doesn't stifle critics
Opposition compares comments to the Ducros 'moron' incident

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The Ottawa Citizen

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Friday, February 28, 2003

Liberal MP Carolyn Parrish apologized to United States ambassador Paul Cellucci yesterday for anti-American remarks she made leaving a Parliament Hill scrum the day before.

But while a U.S. Embassy spokesman said Mr. Cellucci accepted the apology, Ms. Parrish's fellow parliamentarians and even one outraged Ottawa high school student weren't so understanding. Many MPs, even inside her own party, called her remarks unacceptable and some demanded her removal as chairwoman of a committee on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The opposition Canadian Alliance charged the Wednesday incident, when Ms. Parrish muttered the words: "Damn Americans. Hate those bastards," after addressing possible U.S. military action against Iraq, was part of a trend of anti-American rhetoric within the Liberal government.

Despite the wave of criticism about the Ontario MP's conduct, there was less agreement on what had provoked it and what implications the resulting scandal would have outside Canada.

"I rise on a point of privilege," Ms. Parrish said yesterday in the House of Commons, "to express my regret over inappropriate comments that I made outside this House yesterday.

"These are difficult and frustrating times for everyone," she added. "I share a fear of imminent war experienced by many Canadians. That fear and frustration does not justify my comments. I sincerely regret having made them and have made a full apology to Mr. Cellucci, the ambassador to the United States."

Ms. Parrish then avoided the reporters gathered in the lobby of the House, but the controversy she had sparked dogged the government throughout the day.

An Ottawa student with dual Canadian-U.S. citizenship forced Defence Minister John McCallum to address the flak from Ms. Parrish's comment at a meeting earlier yesterday of the Conference of Defence Associations.

Seventeen-year-old Rebecca Willems asked Mr. McCallum how he could urge Canadians to support the U.S. after the remarks Ms. Parrish made.



CREDIT: Bruno Schlumberger, The Ottawa Citizen

Rebecca Willems, 17, who has dual Canadian-U.S. citizenship, asked Defence Minister John McCallum how he could urge Canadians to support the U.S. after the remarks Ms. Parrish made.



Liberal MP Carolyn Parrish apologizes for her comments about Americans in the House of Commons, Thursday. (CP/Jonathan Hayward)

"Above all, as American difficulties increase, we should resist any temptation to become smug and superior," said Mr. McCallum, also quoting former prime minister Lester Pearson.

"This message is a particularly good message for members of Lester Pearson's party -- my party," Mr. McCallum told Ms. Willems.

"These are dangerous times, difficult times. As Lester Pearson said, it is particularly when the United States is at times of difficulty that we in this country should refrain from being smug.

"We have our differences with the Americans, as Lester Pearson did, over, for example, Vietnam. But whatever our differences may be, we are friends or allies."

Joe Volpe, one of Ms. Parrish's fellow Ontario Liberal backbenchers, joined the ranks of those saying her remarks weren't representative of the party at large. Mr. Volpe suggested Parrish's comments about the looming conflict in Iraq may have been rooted in the anti-war -- and anti-American -- feelings of a generation of Canadians that came of age during the Vietnam War, three decades ago.

But Alliance foreign affairs critic Jason Kenney scoffed at such an explanation for anti-U.S. anger.

"You can come up with all the excuses you want," Mr. Kenney said. "When you are a member of Parliament, operating at the national stage, you don't have the liberty to use hate-filled language as though you were some sophomore college member of the campus Trotsky club. This is not acceptable speech for a member of Parliament in the government of a G-7 country."

Mr. Kenney compared Ms. Parrish's comments to those of Françoise Ducros, the former communications director to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien who resigned last fall after she was overheard by reporters calling U.S. President George W. Bush a moron.

"Just like with Françoise Ducros, this remark is going to get coverage in the United States," Mr. Kenney said, adding critical comments were treated differently than largely positive speeches, such as one Mr. Chrétien made this month on a visit to Chicago.

"Colourful, particularly explicit statements of hatred for the United States are going to get picked up in the United States in a way that a bland foreign policy speech never will," Mr. Kenney said. "So, (Ms. Parrish's remark) will resonate in the United States. But even if it didn't, an expression of hatred for a national group, let alone that of our closest friend and ally is totally, totally unacceptable and it's not good enough just to say that she has apologized, it's behind us. This is part of a pattern from senior Liberals, from members of their caucus and the prime minister has to exercise leadership."

A spokesman in Mr. Chrétien's office said the prime minister would not be issuing a statement. Mr. Chrétien did not stop to take reporters' questions about Ms. Parrish during his state visit yesterday to Mexico.

In the U.S., conservative pundit Pat Buchanan, told of Ms. Parrish' comments, fired back at what he saw as a deteriorating Canadian-American relationship.

"Americans don't pay a great deal of attention to Canada," Mr. Buchanan told Global National, "but the truth is every time we hear from Canada, it's something like the Americans are called bastards, or the president of the United States is a moron. You get the Bush bashing, the Yankee baiting again and again. I think Americans are coming to believe that maybe the Canadians don't like us."

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