

The most effective method of advancing the deflation of extended childhood nostalgia is by injecting it with a heavy dose of reality.

You get the idea that when the Prime Minister was a young lad, if Ma and Pa Harper ever took him and some classmates away to vacation in a log cabin, young Stephen would quietly while away the long days by watching his friends play with matches. Some friends.

Stephen Harper has a problem. You just haven't read about it – until now.

Back in the windup to the slow-pitch that became the last federal election, Mr. Harper was asked by a member of the Ottawa press, ahem, hypothetically speaking, of what his 'base' might demand if the Conservatives won a majority. Would they revisit abortion? Revisit gay marriage? Have weekly Cabinet prayer sessions?

Mr. Harper took the bait, hook, line and sinker. "I want to assure Canadians that a Conservative Government will respect their wishes", he said.

Introducing Stephen Harper, then,

unsure neophyte. Nice, flatlined and typically droll, he didn't even have the good sense to try to dispel the notion that the wingnuts in his party were alive and well. He didn't have to. Because it was true. But now?

Last week, the evolved, accomplished Prime Minister attended a rally of some 2,000 loyalists and Tory faithful in Toronto, where, he addressed the issue of the extremists constricting his party, boa-like, but without outright saying it. He insisted, brilliantly, that the Tories should be branded as "middle of the road" in the next election.

Far from being droll this time, he prof-



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There's something about Stephen

ferred that Canadians must see it this way because the Tories have played a moderate hand while government. Then he delivered a budget that backed his assertion to the hilt.

Introducing Harper, political utilitarian. Over a glass of beer, perhaps several, watching his

beloved Toronto Maple Leafs, he'd admit to wanting the backroom to move to the front. He'd also tell you that he's, obviously, had quite enough of the one- or two-issue lunatic fringe that is seemingly the only matter standing in the way of the gold box with the keys to 24 Sussex for a solid four years.

It's certainly not that Canadians don't know enough about the Prime Minister. They do and he's done an admirable job. It is, in fact, what Canadians do know about the current brand of his party that still makes them uneasy.

The rethermalized Alliance nutbars, who have a soCon agenda a mile long and half-a-mile wide, while a small group, continue to hijack key local riding associations, some even with a thinly-veiled ruse, such as the environment, but really, more concerned about what women can or should do with their bodies or why houses of faith must be banishing gays. Yup, really sensible priorities to the single mother, or long-haul truck driver, both trying desperately to work the kitchen table and not an altar.

Maybe the answer to the PM's problem isn't too far into the woods after all.

Introducing Harper: Man with two buckets full of ice-water ripping up the middle of the road, back to that log cabin ... to deal with some former friends. God bless.

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