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## Embattled Liberal MP resigns critic post

### All 10 Liberal leadership candidates condemned deputy foreign affairs critic's statements about Hezbollah

Aug. 23, 2006. 07:56 PM

CANADIAN PRESS

VANCOUVER — The Liberals' deputy foreign affairs critic has resigned after an uproar over his statements that Canada should negotiate directly with Lebanon's Hezbollah, which is on Canada's list of terrorist organizations.

Borys Wrzesnewskyj created a backlash within his own party when he made the statement during a visit by opposition MPs to Lebanon last week.

He was also reported to have said Hezbollah should be taken off Canada's terrorist list, comments he later denied.

But when repeatedly pressed by reporters Wednesday on whether he'd actually made them, he finally admitted his statement was an error.

"I went to Lebanon without preconceived conclusions and my comments in South Lebanon were tempered by the overwhelming power of what I witnessed," he said.

The suburban Toronto MP's comments have dominated the Liberals' three-day summer caucus retreat that was supposed to concentrate on strategy for the upcoming fall session of Parliament.

"It is important that the attention paid to statements I have made not impede the Liberal Party of Canada or our caucus' efforts to bring forward

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policies which would reinforce the fragile ceasefire and aid in the humanitarian and infrastructure crises that exist," Wrzesnewskyj said, reading from a prepared statement.

He also said he supports a UN resolution which says all warring parties must go back to the negotiating table.

His resignation came Wednesday after interim party leader Bill Graham asked him to explain his comments.

"Therefore, I consider that matter closed," Graham said.

All 10 Liberal leadership hopefuls, including Wrzesnewskyj's preferred candidate Gerard Kennedy, stepped up to condemn the remarks but some said he should have a chance to explain himself.

The controversy has exposed an apparent split in the party over its policy towards the Middle East.

A number of prominent members of Canada's Jewish community, including power couple Gerry Schwartz and Heather Reisman, have left the party over its perceived lack of support for Israel's bombardment of Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon.

Frank Dimant, executive vice president of B'nai Brith Canada, welcomed the resignation.

"He was rightly isolated by members of his own caucus and ordinary Canadians for views that run contrary not only to government policy and the law of the land, but also contradict values such as respect for human life and tolerance for all freedom-loving peoples," he said in a news release.

Dimant also praised Liberal leadership candidates Scott Brison and Carolyn Bennett, "who distinguished themselves from their peers by, rather than sitting on the fence on this issue," immediately called for Wrzesnewskyj's resignation.

Kennedy said he was satisfied with the Toronto MP's statement and admired his decision to resign.

"I think Borys has clarified what he had to say," Kennedy said.

However, Bennett who called Tuesday for Wrzesnewskyj's resignation, said she remains "worried" the MP accused Israel of engaging in "state terrorism."

"You can't throw around words like terrorism. That is appalling," she said.

But Kennedy said that comment was included in Wrzesnewskyj's blanket statement that he shouldn't have drawn conclusions and spoke in the heat of the moment.

"I understand that. It's a human thing, the conditions that he saw," Kennedy said.

Bennett said the controversy should prompt parliamentarians to reconsider whether they should go on tours sponsored by groups with any particular bias or agenda.

Wrzesnewskyj's trip was sponsored by a lobby group that promotes Canadian-Arab relations.

"It's heart-wrenching seeing these kinds of things but you can't go and see Lebanon without going to see Haifa," she said, referring to the Israeli city that has been the target of many Hezbollah missiles.

Some frustrated MPs have complained the prolonged leadership race is to blame for the party's lack of coherence on issues, particularly the conflict in Lebanon.

uniform, consistent and clear policy that can be articulated by someone like Prime Minister (Stephen) Harper on behalf of his government and party," said Montreal MP Irwin Cotler, the former justice minister.

Wrzesnewskyj (pronounced Rez-NEV-skee) is not the only Liberal to generate controversy over the Middle East. Former cabinet minister Denis Coderre marched recently in a peace rally in Montreal that included Hezbollah supporters hoisting the organization's flag.

Coderre said Wednesday he attended the rally because it was a peace rally and that it's unfair to say that all 15,000 people who were there were Hezbollah supporters.

He said efforts were made to have the Hezbollah flags lowered.

"I even denounced them myself," he said.

"I was there and in a balanced way, denounced violence wheresoever it was."

Thomas Hubert, the party's youth leader in British Columbia, recently wrote on an Internet blog that Israel was the "most vile nation in human history," and suggested Hezbollah might be considered freedom fighters.

He now has resigned his post on the youth wing executive.

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