

PROOF

The black fox is a stream she divines by chance or geometry, a flash of dark fluidity, the crest of a night wave, its sharp muzzle and sharper eyes. Her path and the fox's path, not quite parallel lines, arrest at confluence—they hover, eye to eye, the shortest distance between two points.

The fox has encountered a human before, she can see the calm in its hesitation, its poised, exact appraisal. The two of them afloat on the greenery of their discrete trails, the fox's less discernible, and low-slung, hers wide, groomed, almost a road. One all-encompassing gaze

and the fox dismisses her, she feels herself drop as the black head swims into the grey cross-hatching of alder—it swallows the elliptical sweep of tail, white-tipped, as if the water the fox is frothed just there. A form drawn from nothing, as hers is, the water she is, upright, cylindrical, a standing

well or a stranded waterfall, too far from the earth and lonely for it. She's covetous of every still pool or rill, of the innumerable lives at home in the planes of light and dark, moving among the conifers which do not walk, their slow green turbulence the fox flows into an intimacy—ground-swell—between the forest and all other forms of water.

—Elizabeth Philips

Occasionally, however—and increasingly during Stephen Harper's leadership—a weather balloon gets sent up in Parliament. In 2012, a balloon was launched by the Conservative backbencher Stephen Woodworth, who tabled a motion that called for a special committee to determine when life begins—in essence, opening the door to Canadian personhood legislation.

During the run up to the American election, Planned Parenthood employed a new slogan meant as a warning to right-wing politicians: "Women are Watching." Women were watching in Canada, too—

clearly the machinations taking place in the U.S. sent people such as myself into hypervigilance. Woodworth's motion 312 was pounced upon as a none-too-subtle effort to put the criminalization of abortion back on the table, making headlines and sparking protests and petitions from the moment it was put forth.

Prime Minister Harper told the media he did not support the motion—one of his explicit election vows being that he would not re-open the abortion debate. Nonetheless, he allowed a free vote on the motion, an action NDP opposition leader Thomas Mulcair called Harper's

"backdoor way of signaling to (his) base." The motion was voted down 203-91, as predicted, but eight Conservative cabinet ministers, and nearly half the party's caucus, voted in its favour, including Rona Ambrose, the Minister for the Status of Women.

The weather balloon deflated and fell back to earth, but perhaps the true impact of having launched it in the first place was realized a few months later when the National Post conducted a poll asking 1,735 randomly selected Canadians over the age of eighteen when abortion should be legal. Researchers were startled when a full sixty percent of those polled replied, "Always." Only a year previously, that number had been fifty-one percent. Stephen Woodworth was credited with having entrenched public opinion in favour of legalized abortion. Not to mention that his motion was "happening alongside a U.S. election campaign in which abortion played a very prominent, contentious part," as the National Post's Matt Gurney observed. "Canadians seem to have responded by becoming even more pro-choice."

Alberta, my home province, is typically viewed as the Canadian hotbed of U.S.-style social conservative values, but the 2012 provincial election threw that stereotype into question. When the 'bozo eruptions' of extreme-right Wild Rose Party candidates began leaking into the media—one candidate talked about the "advantage" of being Caucasian, another (an evangelical pastor) blogged about gays "burning in a lake of fire"—the Wild Rose landslide predicted in the polls was reversed, and the Conservative Party, with its first female leader in history, continued its forty-one year power monopoly, taking sixty-one seats to the Wild Rose's seventeen.

"The lesson here," the National Post quoted strategist Goldy Hyder as saying, "is that the Alberta voter, and certainly the Canadian voter, has decided that issues that have already been settled are best left alone." Canada's conservative newspaper of record went on to sound the death knell for social conservatism in this country, pronouncing it "an electorally toxic Pandora's Box."