



Jack Layton's final letter to all Canadians, dated Saturday, Aug. 20, 2011, two days before he died:

Dear Friends,

Tens of thousands of Canadians have written to me in recent weeks to wish me well. I want to thank each and every one of you for your thoughtful, inspiring and often beautiful notes, cards and gifts. Your spirit and love have lit up my home, my spirit, and my determination.

Unfortunately my treatment has not worked out as I hoped. So I am giving this letter to my partner Olivia to share with you in the circumstance in which I cannot continue.

I recommend that Hull-Aylmer MP Nycole Turmel continue her work as our interim leader until a permanent successor is elected.

I recommend the party hold a leadership vote as early as possible in the New Year, on approximately the same timelines as in 2003, so that our new leader has ample time to reconsolidate our team, renew our party and our program, and move forward towards the next election.

A few additional thoughts:

To other Canadians who are on journeys to defeat cancer and to live their lives, I say this: please don't be discouraged that my own journey hasn't gone as well as I had hoped. You must not lose your own hope. Treatments and therapies have never been better in the face of this disease. You have every reason to be optimistic, determined, and focused on the future. My only other advice is to cherish every moment with those you love at every stage of your journey, as I have done this summer.

To the members of my party: we've done remarkable things together in the past eight years. It has been a privilege to lead the New Democratic Party and I am most grateful for your confidence, your support, and the endless hours of volunteer commitment you have devoted to our cause. There will be those who will try to persuade you to give up our cause. But that cause is much bigger than any one leader. Answer them by recommitting with energy and determination to our work. Remember our proud history of social justice, universal health care, public pensions and making sure no one is left behind. Let's continue to move forward. Let's demonstrate in everything we do in the four years before us that we are ready to serve our beloved Canada as its next government.

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To the members of our parliamentary caucus: I have been privileged to work with each and every one of you. Our caucus meetings were always the highlight of my week. It has been my role to ask a great deal from you. And now I am going to do so again. Canadians will be closely watching you in the months to come. Colleagues, I know you will make the tens of thousands of members of our party proud of you by demonstrating the same seamless teamwork and solidarity that has earned us the confidence of millions of Canadians in the recent election.

To my fellow Quebecers: On May 2nd, you made an historic decision. You decided that the way to replace Canada's Conservative federal government with something better was by working together in partnership with progressive-minded Canadians across the country. You made the right decision then; it is still the right decision today; and it will be the right decision right through to the next election, when we will succeed, together. You have elected a superb team of New Democrats to Parliament. They are going to be doing remarkable things in the years to come to make this country better for us all.

To young Canadians: All my life I have worked to make things better. Hope and optimism have defined my political career, and I continue to be hopeful and optimistic about Canada. Young people have been a great source of inspiration for me. I have met and talked with so many of you about your dreams, your frustrations, and your ideas for change. More and more, you are engaging in politics because you want to change things for the better. Many of you have placed your trust in our party. As my time in political life draws to a close I want to share with you my belief in your power to change this country and this world. There are great challenges before you, from the overwhelming nature of climate change to the unfairness of an economy that excludes so many from our collective wealth, and the changes necessary to build a more inclusive and generous Canada. I believe in you. Your energy, your vision, your passion for justice are exactly what this country needs today. You need to be at the heart of our economy, our political life, and our plans for the present and the future.

And finally, to all Canadians: Canada is a great country, one of the hopes of the world. We can be a better one – a country of greater equality, justice, and opportunity. We can build a prosperous economy and a society that shares its benefits more fairly. We can look after our seniors. We can offer better futures for our children. We can do our part to save the world's environment. We can restore our good name in the world. We can do all of these things because we finally have a party system at the national level where there are real choices; where your vote matters; where working for change can actually bring about change. In the months and years to come, New Democrats will put a compelling new alternative to you. My colleagues in our party are an impressive, committed team. Give them a careful hearing; consider the alternatives; and consider that we can be a better, fairer, more equal country by working together. Don't let them tell you it can't be done.

My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.

All my very best,

Jack Layton