

Conservatives are NOT making it better
Lessons from Ottawa are not encouraging to LGBTQ youth
By Lyla Miklos
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Last week, I watched Rick Mercer's rant about LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) teen suicides and the need for LGBTQ role models. His rant wasn't just a dig at the political establishment. It was real, raw, passionate, and came from the heart. As an out queer woman and LGBTQ activist, I am teary every time I watch his message.

Last week, I also watched an amateurish It Gets Better video made by members of the Conservative Party of Canada. Some staffers say some heartfelt and sincere words. Some even use the word gay. Then several Conservative MPs appear in the video repeating the same words as if reading from cue cards: "It gets better. Call the Kids Help Phone."

No MPs use the words "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "transgender" or "queer." No MPs speak from the heart, and share their own experiences and words of encouragement. Their video came across as hollow and insincere.

The It Gets Better project (www.itgetsbetter.org) was created by out gay columnist Dan Savage and his partner in September 2010. The project's message is that many LGBTQ youth can't picture what their lives might be like as openly gay adults. They can't imagine a future for themselves. So let's show them what our lives are like as LGBTQ adults, so we no longer lose a single LGBTQ youth to suicide.

People who support the project pledge to speak up against hate and intolerance, and provide hope for LGBTQ and other bullied teens by letting them know that it gets better.

I have witnessed monumental progress for LGBTQ rights in my lifetime, but these suicides remind me that there is still so much work yet to be done. The bullying these teens experience on a daily basis for doing something that I couldn't even imagine doing when I was a teen, coming out, is completely unacceptable.

The cruelty of teenagers isn't born in a vacuum. Rodgers and Hammerstein put it best: "You've got to be taught to hate and fear; you've got to be taught from

year to year. It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear. You've got to be carefully taught."

With that lyric in mind, I reflect on what the Conservative Party of Canada has taught our children about LGBTQ Canadians:

- Prime Minister Harper initiated a free vote to reopen the issue of same-sex marriage for debate. John Baird is the only Conservative MP in the It Gets Better video who voted against reopening the debate. LESSON: LGBTQ relationships don't deserve to be legitimate and legal
- Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney removed language from a study guide for new Canadians on the equal rights LGBTQ people are granted in our country. LESSON: Setting a positive example globally on progressive human rights for LGBTQ people isn't something to be proud of.
- Public Safety Minister Vic Toews, who appears in the video, and several other Conservative MPs spoke out against Bill C-250, which amended the hate propaganda sections of the Criminal Code to expand the current definition of protected groups to include sexual orientation. LESSON: Lesbians, gays and bisexuals should not be protected against hate.
- Conservative Senator Don Meredith, who appears in the video, said that being gay is a choice. LESSON: If being LGBTQ is too hard, don't worry, you can just choose to be straight instead.
- In an interview with the Toronto Star, MP David Sweet, who appears in the video, was asked if homosexuality is a sin. His answer. "Yes. Absolutely." LESSON: You should be ashamed of being LGBTQ.
- Federal Conservatives have cut funds to Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto Pride; compared homosexuality to pedophilia; buried a Justice report that stated LGBTQ parents are just as good at raising their children as heterosexual parents; and have said that being gay is a disease and unnatural.

Should I be grateful that MPs who have expressed such homophobic views in the past have appeared in this video? Should I be hopeful that a political party that systematically works towards taking away my rights as an LGBTQ Canadian feels a collective sense of guilt due to the suicide of out gay teen Jamie Hubley? Is this progress? Or is it just meaningless rhetoric?

Graeme MacKay's editorial cartoon depicting Sweet as a poor defenseless little guy being bullied by the LGBTQ community misses the point entirely. MacKay's depiction of the LGBTQ community in his cartoon is also incredibly offensive on multiple levels. Is this how he sees us?

Sweet is in a position of privilege and power that our LGBTQ youth are not. He is a public figure who must be held to account for his record on LGBTQ issues. He could use his role as a member of our federal government to better the lives of LGBTQ Canadians. He has not. When he does, then I can truly believe in his presence and message in an It Gets Better video. Lyla Miklos lives in Hamilton.