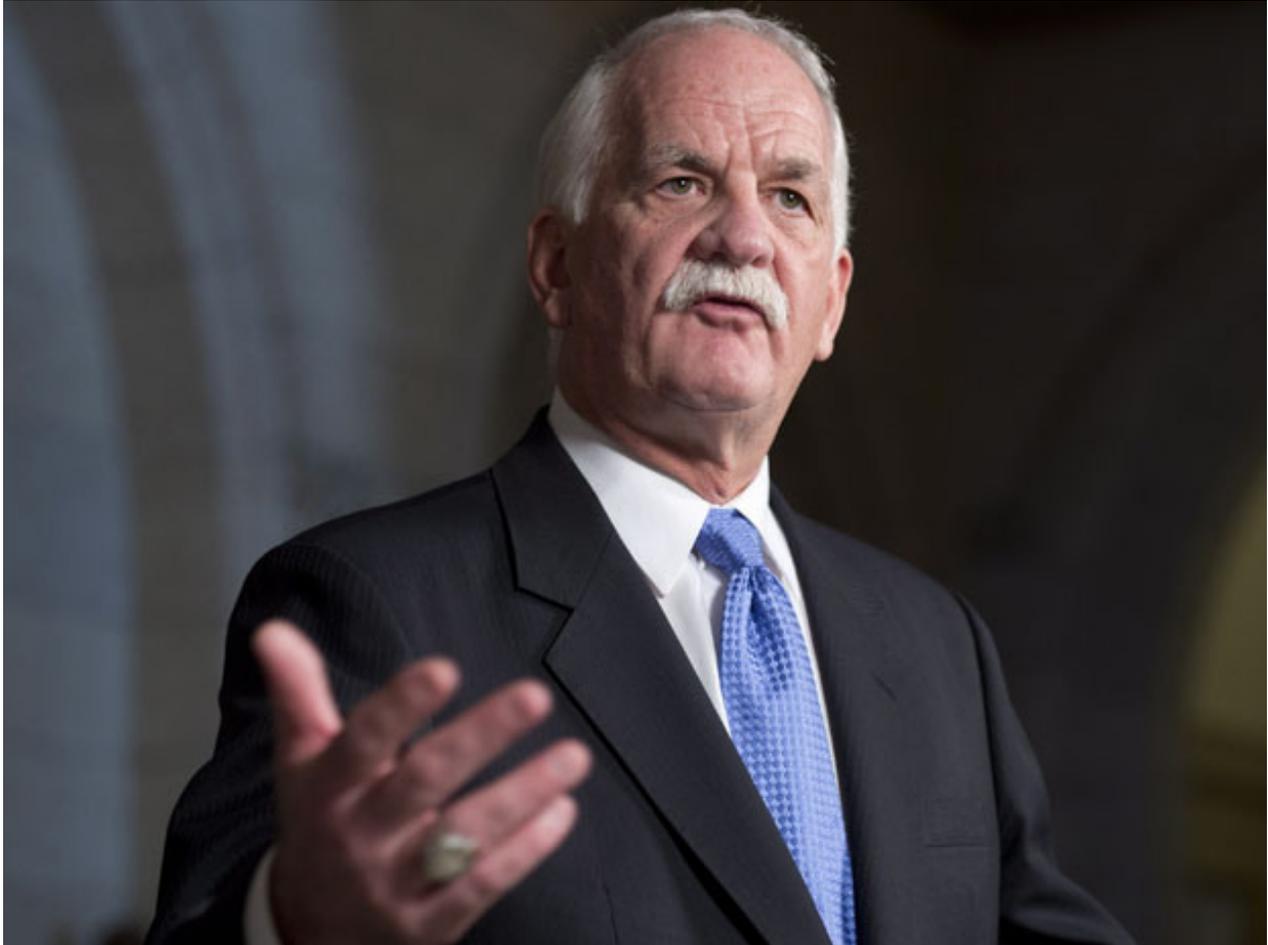


Public Safety Minister Vic Toews resigns ahead of Harper's expected cabinet shuffle

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OTTAWA — Public Safety Minister Vic Toews has announced he is resigning as a minister and Member of Parliament effective Tuesday.

Toews said in a statement that he is leaving public life in order to focus on his family and to pursue opportunities in the private sector.

The resignation, which had been expected, is the latest development that foreshadows an anticipated major cabinet shuffle by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

“The time has come to step aside and begin the next chapter of my life,” Toews said in lengthy statement on Monday. “I am leaving public life in order to focus on my family and to pursue opportunities in the private sector.”

In the statement, Toews thanked many groups of people including his constituents, the prime minister, his parliamentary colleagues, staffers and his family.

“It has been an honour to represent the people of Provencher for the past 12-and-a-half years in the House of Commons. I would like to express my gratitude to my constituents for placing their trust in me. It is a responsibility I took very seriously and a privilege I will never forget.

“When I entered federal politics in 2000, I did so with the intention of making a positive contribution to Canada by being a part of the movement to unite conservatives across the country. Looking back, I believe I accomplished what I did because of my desire to work with other like-minded people.”

Toews, one of the Harper government’s more polarizing ministers, was first elected to Parliament as a Manitoba member of Parliament in 2002

He was appointed Minister of Justice in 2006, and became President of the Treasury Board in January 2007, before serving as public safety minister.

Toews touted himself as a champion of victims’ rights, who was determined to make “communities stronger” and build “safer streets.”

On Monday, he defended that legacy in his statement.

“I leave public office at a time when I believe our country is more sensitive to the needs of victims, more fiscally sound and safer for citizens and future generations of Canadians,” he said.

He oversaw passage of legislation designed to improve RCMP accountability, provide more protections to witnesses of crime and combat terrorism. He was also the face of legislation intended to crack down on human smuggling.

At times, he clashed with civil liberties groups, even with Canada’s chiefs of police, over issues such as the controversial repeal of the long-gun registry.

He also got flak over his suggestion that lawmakers who didn’t support the government’s bill to give police easier access to phone and Internet subscriber information — dubbed the Internet “snooping” bill by critics — sided with child pornographers.

The bill eventually dropped.

Toews’ relationship with RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson at times was frosty, such as late last year when he publicly chastised the top Mountie for discussing the results of a gender-audit with Postmedia News before it had been officially released and demanded a plan of action be delivered to him to address issues raised in the audit.

His office was also criticized for appearing to micro-manage the RCMP when it established a “communications protocol” with the force, requiring the force to provide “timely situational awareness” to the minister’s office on all public communications that may draw national attention.

When Paulson was appointed the top Mountie in late 2011, he was provided with a 200-plus page briefing document outlining his responsibilities.

The document stressed that the commissioner must be “attentive to maintaining good working relations with the Minister’s office” and that while there are legal and administrative aspects to their relationship, it is also one that is “very personal and professional.”

“Given the need for the Minister and the Commissioner to work together, this accountability relationship can be manifested in something as immediate as a telephone call,” the document said.

Despite repeated calls by outside experts for the government to create an external civilian management board for the RCMP to help the force bring about true cultural change within the force, Toews rejected the idea earlier this year, saying there were sufficient accountability and oversight structures in place.