Mackenzie King Essay, Research Paper

WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE KING “It’s what we prevent, rather than what we do in government that counts most,” once said Mackenzie King, the great prime minister of the twentieth century in Canada. A philosophy that led him through twenty-two strong years in the office of the Prime Minister of Canada. King, the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie (the leader of the great rebellion in upper Canada in 1837), who’s long standing goal in life was to be Prime Minister, worked hard at his job, and did his job for the people of Canada. Thus, being very well admired by Canadian Citizens, and getting the majority of the votes in national elections. King led Canada through the later half of the depression in the thirties and throughout all of World War II. This paper will examine further into the life & times of William Lyon Mackenzie King, through his times of joy, spiritualism, and depression. Mackenzie King was born in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario, December 17th, 1874. King had pretty much a typical upbringing and childhood. He seemed to love his mother, Isabel Grace – Mackenzie, more than anyone else and had a lifelong commitment to her. Early in his life, King was very successful in academics and basically devoted his life at the time to school. King graduated at the age of seventeen, and then proceeded to The University of Toronto, where he graduated with first class honours, in 1895. Afterwards he attended The University of Chicago, and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. King was definitely the model for “a promising young man.” And so upon completion of University, King was drawn into politics by Sir Wilfred Laurier in 1908, where he ran for MP in Waterloo, and won. Even by virtue of not having and prior political experience or success. Prime Minister Laurier named King the new Minister of Labour in 1909 when King was still only 35, which basically got him walking in the sense of politics. In 1911 the Liberals were defeated and King lost his seat in the parliament. Again, in 1917, the Liberals were defeated. Two years later, Liberals gave up on Laurier and were looking for a new leader. That Leader was to be Mackenzie King. “This to be a year of momentous decisions so far as my own life is concerned,” stated King in his first ever diary entry on New Year’s Day, 1919. Just two years after taking over the Liberals, King was elected the Prime Minister of Canada. Becoming Prime Minister was just the beginning of a long life of fame for Mackenzie King. He was to become the second most long standing Prime Minister in Canadian history. King came to power at age 47 and already had 13 years of political activity under his belt. He was confident, sure of himself of the great job he could do for the country he loved. In King’s first term in office he tried to lower tariffs and freight rates in order to better financially accommodate the prairie farmers. But he didn’t lower them enough and most of the farmers gave up and started to give their support to the PC’s who were a new party and represented the farmers at the time. King needed the prairie farmers support in order to maintain a majority government which didn’t happen in the election of 1925. The Liberals lost a vote of confidence the following year and an reelection was called. King thought it would be a good idea to introduce Old-Age Pension in order to restore a majority government, which they did. And although the liberals lost the next election in 1930 to RB Bennett, bringing in Old Age Pension was a good idea for the long run because the Great Depression started when the conservatives were in power and they didn’t have Old Age Pension in place when they were in power. So when everyone went broke in the early 30’s, it was obviously

time for someone who could help the people to step back in. And who else but Mackenzie King? Everyone had known that King gave Old Age Pension in his last term, so they believed him this time when he told them he would use it again, and that is why he came back and won the election of 1935 with the biggest majority victory ever in Canada to date. From here on until his retirement, King would be the favorite political figure among politicians in Canada. He seemed to be the only person the Canadians could trust. He was a laid-back, mild-mannered conciliator. He never had a great image and he never gave any great speeches, there was just something about him that Canadians trusted. And when World War II was heightening in 1942, who better to have representing you than Mackenzie King? Now, King had promised that there wouldn’t be conscription in his election campaign in 1940, so he couldn’t go back on his word and put conscription into place. Plus, the number of enlistments for Quebecers was higher than ever and Quebec seemed to be showing more signs of patriotism, and to have conscription put into place would have just blanked out the fact that Canadians should be realizing that Quebec was wanting to become more of a part of Canada. So what King did was ask the people of Canada If they wanted conscription or not with the “National Plebiscite On Conscription.” The government got the “yes” vote they were hoping for and immediately implemented conscription. King made a great decision by asking the people if they wanted conscription, because if he didn’t know and would have made the decision that the people didn’t want, then everyone would’ve been upset with him at a time of war, when people are already upset enough. So, it is obvious that he made the right decision. He had to leave it up to the people because otherwise he would have been falling back on his words of promising no conscription. This was truly one of the highlights of his career. Most of Canada was involved in the war effort. Propaganda, munition factories, and women’s groups all helped the war effort back home in Canada much like in World War I. King led Canada along with the Allied Forces to Victory in Europe, and liberation of countries conquered by Germany. King Continued to be Prime Minister for 3 years after the war when he resigned at the age of 74. William Lyon Mackenzie King died 2 years later in Kingsmere, PQ. There was a side to King that not everyone knew about. He was a spiritualist, and claimed to have communicated with the spirits of his mother, Isabel Grace-Mackenzie, Wilfred Laurier, and his grandfather, William Lyon Mackenzie. He recorded that the people he communicated with gave him advice and helped him through his years in office. No one knew about his spiritualistic ways until it was discovered in his diaries he had kept before his death in 1950. The importance that Mackenzie King played in the history of Canada was quite large. He always wanted to be Prime Minister of Canada and so was devoted deeply to doing the job well. He appointed Carine Wilson the first woman Senator in 1930, which was a big step in helping women with women’s rights. His most important role played in the history of Canada was definitely the strong leadership throughout World War II. Had it not been for his “National Plebiscite On Conscription,” Perhaps the Allied forces would not have been strong enough to defeat the Germans, and the Germans and the Japanese could’ve taken over the world. Well, that’s not really likely, but The Conscription of World War II was such a good call on King’s part. It brought Canada together as a whole and changed patriotism in Canada forever. In conclusion, the issues brought fourth in this paper suggests that King’s great leadership and decision making throughout WWII, his appointment of Carine Wilson as the first woman Senator, and his desire and strive for excellence as the Prime Minister, are all excellent evidence that William Lyon Mackenzie King was truly a great Canadian.