

Julie Van Dusen of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's daily political television show, "Politics," interviews *Forum President, Bob Rae* (April, 2003). "Politics" is broadcast on the CBC's Newsworld network.

Q Welcome back. Well there was a lot of talk today on Parliament Hill about what role Canada can play in the reconstruction of Iraq. It's been suggested on more than one occasion that Canada could contribute expertise and advice in helping Iraq design a new system of government. The Forum of Federations works in countries that are considering adopting a federal system. It's an international group based in Ottawa and joining me now to discuss what Canada would be able to do to help Iraq is the Forum's Chairman, the former Premier of Ontario, Bob Rae. He's in Toronto. How are you doing?

B. Rae Fine, how are you doing?

Q Just great thanks. So, we've heard both from Bill Graham and the prime minister who said that Canada does have some experience with federations and that maybe there could be a role for Canada in Iraq. So that's your expertise. What role is there for Canada in the rebuilding of, of Iraq in terms of its government?

B. Rae Well I think, I think Canada, like a lot of countries, has, you know, has, has a strong experience with, with federalism and with democracy and one of the things that, I think there's a great deal of consensus about, in the world today is that how countries are governed really matters. It has a huge impact on their economies, a huge impact on their ability to grow and, and, and to do well.

So I think that Canada can make a contribution at the Forum of Federations we've started thinking, we, we're thinking about the Afghanistan situation, we've, we've been doing some work with people in Sri Lanka where the parties have been at war for 20 years, it's been a vicious civil war and we've been asked by the parties to advise them on the peace process and on, on the, the federal idea, which they have adopted as a framework for discussion. I think it's very early days in Iraq. I mean one has to recognize that the war is not yet over. That it's not entirely clear how the reconstruction is going to take place, what role there will be for, for the United Nations and for other countries who've not been engaged directly in the war.

But I certainly think that, that for example, at the Forum we, we are thinking about this question. We have a network of groups around the world, we're talking to people obviously about their views, we, we are contacted by people in a variety of communities who are involved in Iraq, saying, you know, what do you think about this or that. So we've begun a little bit of preliminary work and we'll keep doing that. Obviously we'll be exploring with people at the U.N. in New York and elsewhere the kind of role they anticipate playing in this process. There will be a process, but the, the point is, you've got something to contribute, you're not imposing it on anyone, you're simply providing advice when and if you're asked and I think that that, that's a wise course for us to take as a country.

Q So how do you go about it? I mean this has been a dictatorship for 30 years.

B. Rae Well that's right, but let's, let's reflect on what's happened. First of all in the, in the Kurdish north you have a relatively autonomous community which has been living in relative autonomy and self-government ever since the, the '91 war. You have in the south you have a very significant Shiite population which again, was profoundly affected by the war in '91, has been the victim of extraordinary oppression at the hands of the regime. And you have, I think it's fair to say a very large community outside Iraq of Iraqis who've left, it's a very sophisticated community, a lot of experience with, with civil society, a lot of experience with how things have changed in the west over the last 10, 15 years, who are now I think ready, many of them, to go back to give advice, to be partly involved.

So, I think the point is just again, not to see it as something where, you know, we come in with our briefcases and descend from our planes and say here's your constitution, but to recognize that there will be a process. There's going to be a, a very active discussion in Iraq about the, the constitution, about their democracy, about the form that it will take. President Bush referred to the fact that Iraq would, in his view, become a democratic federation in one of his speeches that he gave very recently about Iraq. So I think that already in the U.S. there's a lot of thinking about it, but the fact of the matter is, as, as everybody I think is agreed, if they can't agree on much else, I think everybody can agree on this that essentially the Iraqis will decide their future and they will decide the kind of government that they're going to have. But it's very hard to see how a community which is as diverse, linguistically, ethnically and religiously as Iraq is, how its democracy would not take on some kind of a decentralized form. That would seem to be the logical step for them to take.

Q And so, who do you think should be pulling the strings here when you, when you look at this? Should this be directed by the United Nations or by the United States or how should, how should people approach this?

B. Rae Well again, that, that's not, frankly that's not for the Forum of Federations to say.

I mean the fact of the matter is, is the Americans and the British and the coalition partners have been fighting a war and obviously feel a very powerful sense of, of ownership of, of the situation. There's also very, I think strong tradition that the United Nations will be heavily involved in humanitarian work and that the United Nations will be very heavily involved in this whole question of how one makes the transition to a more democratic society. This is happening in a great many countries around the world where the U.N. has been very actively engaged, there's a lot of experience in, in this area within the United Nations community.

So I think it's inevitable that it will be a combination, but, but the one element you haven't mentioned that I think I, I have once and will again is that it's the Iraqis themselves who are going to decide on the kind of future that they have. This is, this is not going to be a, a neo-colonial solution, it doesn't work, it won't work. It has to be a solution that comes from within the, from within the Iraqi society from, from within the Iraqi community and I, and I, I strongly believe that's what's going to happen.

Q So just a quick question. Does one have to wait till order is restored before you start thinking of these things or is it time to kind of go in there on the ground somehow and start getting some ideas?

B. Rae Well I think it's time to start really listening. We're obviously doing some thinking, we're doing some comparison work, we're looking at some other countries, we're very intensely looking now at how has the debate evolved in the Iraqi and expatriate community and elsewhere on this question of diversity and federalism. And, you know, that's the kind of thing we do, we're a monitoring post, we're a network, we look and we listen and we do research, that's the, that's what we do and we provide advice when we're asked.

But if you're going to provide useful advice you've got to do your homework and that's, that's what we're doing. And I think that's the process that we'd want to continue.

Q Bob Rae, thanks so much for joining us. And he's with the Forum of Federations and of course the former Premier of Ontario and we look forward to hearing more ideas from you.