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Canadians want PM to quit soon

By BILL RODGERS, OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

OTTAWA -- It's almost time to go, Jean -- 56% of Canadians want you to resign immediately following the national Grit leadership convention in November, according to a SES/Sun Media poll.

Chretien said last August that he would step down in February 2004, when he had served most of his third mandate.

The poll of 1,000 people conducted Feb. 3-Feb. 11 asked: "Should Jean Chretien remain as Prime Minister until February 2004 as he prefers or should he resign in November 2003 once a new Liberal party leader is chosen?"

The survey showed that even those who identified themselves as committed Liberal supporters want the PM to pack up and leave town in November -- 52% of them prefer the earlier resignation date.

Support for a November goodbye is strongest in Atlantic Canada and Quebec at 58%. More than 57% agree in the West.

Only Ontario, which has voted overwhelmingly Liberal for the past three national elections, shows any reluctance, and even then, 51% say Chretien should not hang around for another three months after Liberals choose their new leader.

The poll produced an interesting trend along age groups. Younger Canadians tend to support Chretien's desire to stay until next year.

"Although all age groups favoured the earlier resignation date, Canadians under 30 were the group most likely to favour a February 2004 resignation (46%)," said Nik Nanos, president of SES Canada Research.

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The SES survey also found that federal Liberals continue to enjoy a 30% lead over their nearest opposition rival.

The survey found 47% of Canadians said they would support the Grits if an election were called today. The three national opposition parties -- the Alliance, Tories and New Democrats -- are locked in a virtual tie for second spot.

The poll is considered accurate plus or minus 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

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