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## Harper attacks PM on health

Tory leader says Martin had his chance to fix the system

Sean Gordon; with files from Anne Dawson, Bill Curry and Robert Fife

CanWest News Service

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June 23, 2004

SAULT STE. MARIE, Ont. - Stephen Harper yesterday attacked Paul Martin's key platform promise, saying the Prime Minister "cannot be trusted" with health care.

During a brief stop in Northern Ontario, Mr. Harper said Mr. Martin "could have said no" to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty's new health premiums and that Mr. Martin has had his chance to fix health care.

With polls showing his party has lost ground to the Liberals, Mr. Harper criticized his Liberal counterpart for "sowing division" through a campaign that pits "more traditionally minded Canadians against more progressively minded Canadians ... men against women, West against East, French against English and the federal government against the provinces."

Adding that "federal-provincial games on health care make me sick," Mr. Harper told a partisan audience he is the leader best positioned to work with the provinces to save medicare.

"Any Canadian who is genuinely concerned about our health care system wants a prime minister who will work with the provinces, not pick fights with them. They want a guy who can get results, not a guy who's good at shifting the blame," Mr. Harper said.

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CREDIT: Kevin Van Paassen, National Post  
Conservative leader Stephen Harper throws the ceremonial first pitch at last night's Blue Jays-Devil Rays game at SkyDome in Toronto.

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He stepped up his attacks on a day that saw the release of a new Ipsos-Reid poll giving the Liberals a six-point lead over the Tories, who are at 28% support among decided voters.

Another survey, conducted by the SES polling firm, showed the Liberals with a three-point lead.

Seat projections by Wilfrid Laurier University political scientist Barry Kay suggest the Conservatives' momentum is stalling. Dr. Kay suggests the Tories would win 117 seats and the Liberals 105. All of the changes have occurred in Ontario, which remains volatile electoral ground. The analysis also shows the Bloc Quebecois remains strong with 60 seats and the NDP are poised to elect 26 MPs.

Mr. Martin said yesterday the close race has raised the possibility that he could stay in power even if he does not secure more seats than the Conservatives, but he also appealed to potential NDP and Bloc Quebecois voters to consider that they could end up putting Mr. Harper in power.

"You may well help Stephen Harper become prime minister," Mr. Martin said.

The Prime Minister also hinted he will look for a way to stay in power regardless of a Tory minority. "That depends on the circumstances. We've all seen the permutations and combinations where these things have happened, and they happen differently," Mr. Martin said.

The Liberal leader also said yesterday he is open to changing the controversial federal gun registry. In advance of a visit to Regina today, Mr. Martin said in an interview that removing gun-registry offences from the Criminal Code is "something we want to have a look at."

The change would mean violators would receive a ticket and a fine rather than a criminal record.


NDP leader Jack Layton, campaigning in Ontario and later in Newfoundland, refocused his attack on the rebounding Liberals.

Mr. Layton took issue with Mr. Martin's portrayal of himself as the guardian of health care.

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