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Harper loses another long-term staffer

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LETTER TO
THE EDITOR



OTTAWA -- The summer of discontent in Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's office continues.

Harper's highest-ranking staff member is packing up and leaving following a meeting with him yesterday morning, sources tell Sun Media.

Phil Murphy, the Tory leader's chief of staff since 2002, is the latest in a growing list of staffers who have left or were pushed out of Harper's or the party's inner circle over the past few months.

"No comment," said communications spokesman William Stairs when asked about the impending departure, adding the leader's office does not discuss human resources issues.

One source said yesterday that it wasn't clear whether Murphy had quit or was being forced out of the top staff post. Murphy has served in various backroom capacities for conservatives on Parliament Hill for the past decade.

Another source, however, downplayed the political intrigue behind Murphy's exit, saying he hasn't been feeling well for some time.

"I'm not surprised because he's been battling serious health problems," the source said. "I wondered how he was able to work in such a pressure cooker given his health condition."

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Since Parliament broke for the summer, Harper's director of communications, Geoff Norquay; media relations adviser Mike Storeshaw; and veteran party communications man Jim Armour have said so long.

In a recent SES Research poll, Harper's standing among those who think he would make the best prime minister has actually dropped by 13 percentage points to 14%, putting him well behind Paul Martin at 31% and a point behind NDP boss Jack Layton at 15%.

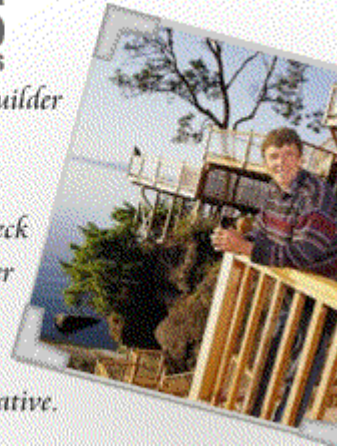
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