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PM needs to be more honest: poll

No. 1 response on Harper: change the leader

By **BILL RODGERS**, SUN OTTAWA BUREAUE-MAIL
TO A
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OTTAWA -- Many Canadians remain skeptical about Prime Minister Paul Martin's honesty on issues ranging from the sponsorship scandal to his knowledge of the day-to-day activities of his shipping empire while he was minister of finance, an SES-Sun Media poll suggests.

The survey of 1,000 Canadians taken earlier this month shows many Canadians question Martin's honesty and accountability on controversial issues.

Others question his big business connections and loopholes that allowed him access to the dealings of Canada Steamship Lines, a company he handed over to his three sons after persistent questions concerning conflict of interest.

Of the more than 50% of those who offered their opinions on what they would change, if anything, about the PM, more than 15% said they would want Martin to be more honest, accountable and transparent.

"There is still some residual image drag resulting from the advertising scandal for Prime Minister Paul Martin," said SES pollster Nik Nanos.

It also appears Martin hasn't managed to completely shake his image as Mr. Dithers: 7.8% of those expressing an opinion want the 67-year-old PM to be more decisive in dealing with the issues, and 5.1% said it was time for the Liberal party to change leaders.

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Other suggestions for Martin: start listening to the people, stop being so arrogant and start standing up to the Americans and U.S. President George W. Bush.

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More than 38% either wouldn't answer or were unsure.

"Compared to Paul Martin, not as many Canadians have formed opinions of what they would change about Stephen Harper," Nanos said.

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The poll showed 51% of respondents couldn't form an opinion of the Conservative leader. Of those who did, however, 8.7% - the No. 1 response - said change the leader.

While 5.8% want the Tory leader to be more open-minded, 5.3% said he should work on improving his personality and image.

Others recommended Harper change his stances on policy issues and be less reliant on religious views in forming his positions.

Harper has been criss-crossing Canada all summer trying to improve his public standing with Canadians, but recent public opinion polls suggest the Grits continue to enjoy a 15% lead over the opposition Conservatives.

The SES poll was taken between Aug. 4 and 8, and is considered accurate to within 3.1%, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

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