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Government re-announces \$16-billion in spending in last four weeks

Conservatives on election footing, trying to do as many announcements as possible to push their message out, says SES pollster Nik Nanos

By BEA VONGDOUANGCHANH

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government re-announced close to \$16-billion in spending initiatives in the last four weeks since the House recessed on June 22, dishing out money for cultural festivals, military equipment, federal pasture lands, biofuel energy projects and more from Stephenville, Nfld., to Port Moody, B.C.

Some experts see the moves as the minority governing Conservatives trying to shore up support in areas where they need to gain more visibility, while the government says it's the normal course of government business.

"I would say this is the new normalcy for minority governments that doesn't know when an election could be and I think any minority government that's on an election footing is going to look to do as many announcements as possible in order to kind of push their message out," SES Research pollster Nik Nanos said last week. "There's a tendency to make high priority swing areas as a greater focus because we know just from a research point of view that Quebec is still a volatile province electorally and is up for grabs and that the Conservatives have been having a tougher time in Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan so it's not surprising that they try to align their announcements with the areas where they need to shore up support. Why would you make an announcement in Alberta? You wouldn't if you were a Conservative because Alberta is in the bag. It wouldn't be a high priority area. Quebec, Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and I would say the 905 belt in Ontario would be the prime time for making announcements."

In his opinion, Mr. Nanos also said the Conservatives are trying

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PM Harper marks 18 months since winning the last election: is he too rigid, too controlling, or do you like his 'take-charge' style?

He's in charge: PM Stephen Harper, pictured recently in Ottawa, is the focus of an exclusive Innovative Research Group poll for *The Hill Times* this week. p. 1



Photograph by Jake Wright, *The Hill Times*

Dion should reach out to Chrétien and Martin-era ministers too: Libs

But others say it would be politically dangerous to bring back Manley, Tobin, Copps, McLellan, Cauchon, Rock, et al., as candidates in next election.

By ABBAS RANA

Grit Leader Stéphane Dion, who announced "star" candidate Jocelyn Coulon in Outremont, Que. last week, should also reach out to former Cabinet ministers and encourage them to run in the next federal

election in an effort to boost the Grit star power in its slate of federal candidates, say senior Liberals. But others say the move would be politically dangerous.

Mr. Dion (Saint-Laurent-Cartierville, Que.) "lacks these high-profile people right now. If he really wants to become prime minister, he's got to bring some of the people who were around before," said one senior Liberal, who requested anonymity, in an interview last week with *The Hill Times*.

"Some of these people have to come on board across the country that have national stature and a national profile if he wants to win the next election."

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Some 75% say Tories should drop the 'Canada's New Government' title: poll

Innovative Research Group poll also found 56% think the PM is a micro-manager and 26% like his take-charge style

By ABBAS RANA

The Harper Conservatives were elected 18 months ago and still prefer to call themselves "Canada's New Government," but according to an exclusive poll by Innovative

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DND's refusal to release documents 'a disregard for oversight'

Michel Drapeau says House Defence Committee should call DND's ATIP coordinator Julie Jansen

By BEA VONGDOUANGCHANH

The Department of National Defence won't release new information regarding Afghan detainees through access to information requests because it's trying to avoid embarrassing revelations, say critics, who also say this represents a "huge step backward on accountability," "a disregard for civilian oversight," and point out that DND's access to information and privacy coordinator is

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FEATURE

Dion should ask Chrétien, Martin-era Cabinet ministers to run in next election, say some Liberals

But others say Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion has to 'show he's a break with the past, especially in Quebec'

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The Grit source said that Mr. Dion should encourage former Liberal Cabinet ministers such as John Manley, former deputy prime minister; Sheila Copps, former Heritage minister; Martin Cauchon, former Justice minister; Allan Rock, former Industry minister; Anne McLellan, former deputy prime minister and Brian Tobin, former Industry minister.

The source pointed out that all these former Cabinet ministers are doing well in their respective fields financially and professionally and don't need to return to politics for their own sake, which means Mr. Dion will have to take the initiative to urge them to run in the next election for the party's sake.

The source said that the name recognition and electoral experience of candidates are critical to win an election.

"The people who have national profile are messengers for the party. If they don't have profile, they are not good messengers because your brain works in such a way that if you recognize the names in a positive way, you listen to the message. So, he doesn't have many of those messengers who have a national profile that when people hear their name on their radio, they're going to listen to it," said the source.

Nelson Wiseman, a professor of political science at the University of Toronto and a regular columnist for *The Hill Times*, said that it's highly unlikely that the former Liberal Cabinet ministers would run in the next election because if they had been interested in running, they would have sought the Liberal leadership. He also said that even if these former Liberal heavyweights decided to run, it could prove to be politically dangerous for the Liberals.

Other parties will say, "This is the big bad old corrupt Liberal government, and it takes away the idea that Dion is a different guy, it's a different party and they've learned something. They're all associated with the Chrétien-Martin regime, so is Dion, but Dion isn't that closely associated to begin with, Dion was kept out of the Cabinet by Martin originally," said Prof. Wiseman.

"I don't think by getting old Liberal candidates, you're going to expand your vote.

I'm not saying you shouldn't do it, I don't think it helps you and I think it can hurt you more than it can help you."

Nik Nanos, president of SES Research, agreed. "I would say one of the key things Stéphane Dion has to do is show that he's a break with the past, especially in the province of Quebec. If there's a perception in Quebec that this is the same Liberal Party with a new leader, it's going to be very difficult for him to make headway. Yes, like all parties, it's important to have star candidates but he'd probably get more mileage out of having some fresh faces."

Elizabeth Whiting, director of communications for the Liberal Party, said that her party has been successful in recruiting a number of star candidates including former Liberal leadership candidates such as Bob Rae; Michael Ignatieff; Gerard Kennedy; and Martha Hall Findlay. Besides these, she said the Liberal Party has recruited Justin Trudeau and is also trying to ensure that 33 per cent of the candidates in the next election are female.

"Led by our leader Stéphane Dion, the Liberals do have an impressive suite of candidates available in the next election. We've got former leadership candidates, we've got new candidates like Justin Trudeau, Betsy McGregor in Ontario, Briony Penn in Victoria, [B.C.] and all efforts, of course, are going to continue to attract high-quality candidates right across the country. We do have many former Cabinet ministers who continue to play an important role in the Liberal Party whether that's giving advice or fundraising or guidance and so on and all certainly would be encouraged to consider running again under the Liberal banner. And of course we have the one third female commitment which will meet in the next election," said Ms. Whiting.

But Mr. Nanos said that rather than just nominating female candidates, the Liberals and other parties should ensure that women are holding decision-making positions in their party and nominated in ridings that are winnable.

"One of the big questions would be, 'Who among the senior leadership, in any party, are the strong women at the table?' And it would be just as important for any of the parties to identify who are the strong women at the table. It would be just as important for any of the political parties to identify who are the senior kind of strong women at the leadership table, than a focus on the body count in regards to how many



Photographs by Jake Wright, *The Hill Times*

Get your game face on Mr. Dion: Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion, left, Martin Cauchon, centre; John Manley, top right, and Sheila Copps, above. Some Grits say Mr. Dion should try to encourage these former Cabinet ministers to run in the next election, but others say it would be a big mistake and politically dangerous.

female candidates they have because they could have female candidates but if they're running in ridings where they can't win, that's really a moot point. What's more important is how many women are there in the party leadership that have significant major roles to play in guiding the party for the future. The same things go for the Conservatives."

Another top Liberal source said that it might be too late to bring back former Chrétien and Martin-era Cabinet ministers to run because most of the nominations across the country have already taken place.

Of the 308 ridings across the country, as of last week, the Liberal Party had nominated candidates in 185 ridings.

Nova Scotia Liberal Senator Terry Mercer, a former national director of the party who was summoned to the Senate by then-prime minister Jean Chrétien, said in an interview that one of the key things to winning the next election is to ensure that all the Liberals who felt disenfranchised in the last few years are brought back to the fold.

The Liberal Party should ensure that "all Liberals be involved in the next campaign, every Liberal's a star. We need everybody to help us. It's a team effort. Everybody should be included. Part of Mr. Dion becoming leader was the fact that some people were excluded. It's time to include everybody. That includes people like Mr. Manley, Ms. Copps, Mr. Cauchon," said Sen. Mercer who supported Mr. Kennedy in the last leadership campaign and who subsequently supported Mr. Dion along with the rest of the Kennedy supporters after the first ballot.

When asked if Mr. Dion was reaching out to all Liberals, Sen. Mercer said: "You can't

be all things to all people. Mr. Dion has made it perfectly clear that the Liberal Party is open and wants to re-engage people who felt disenfranchised for a number of years. He wants them to know, 'You are welcome back.' He wants them to know that their participation and input is sought, is valued."

Ms. Copps, who currently is a columnist with Sun Media and also hosts a weekly syndicated radio talk show *Weekends with Sheila Copps* focusing on lifestyle issues such as health and financial planning, said that she's happy in her current stint as a journalist and has no plans to return to federal politics.

"I'm not coming back. I'm doing what I'm doing, I wouldn't be coming back. It's fun to be watching from the other side," said Ms. Copps in an interview with a chuckle.

Meanwhile, according to a poll by Strategic Counsel, the Harper Conservatives and the Dion Liberals were in a virtual dead heat with 31 per cent support for each party and the NDP trailing the two with 17 per cent support.

The poll indicated that the Conservatives were relatively less popular among women, francophones and voters who earn more than \$100,000 a year.

In Ontario, the Liberals were ahead of the pack with 41 per cent support followed by the Conservatives with 34 per cent support and the NDP with 13 per cent support.

In Quebec, the Bloc Québécois was maintaining its lead with positive opinion from 40 per cent of the Quebecers followed by the Liberals with 25 per cent, the Conservatives with 16 per cent and the NDP with 10 per cent support.

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THE HILL TIMES
Policy Briefing

Canada's North

The Hill Times will look into a number of top political issues in this "Canada's North Policy Briefing." We'll look at Canada's unresolved Arctic boundaries issue and the new American push to join the International Treaty on the Law of the Sea and what it means for sovereignty, natural resources, and defence. We'll take a closer look at Prime Minister Stephen Harper's northern tour this summer as part of a broad Arctic sovereignty campaign and its initiatives to assert sovereignty over the Northwest Passage. We'll also explore the whole issue of climate change and the effects on the North and we'll investigate deeper into Northern economic development issues.

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