

NEWS



Photographs by Jake Wright, *The Hill Times*

Mr. Dion goes to the Canadian Club of Ottawa: Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion met with members of the national media on March 8 at the Chateau Laurier Hotel after delivering a speech to the Canadian Club of Ottawa. Also pictured above left is Liberal MP David McGuinty, former Liberal Party national director Steven MacKinnon and former Grit wagon master Alphée Moreau. Many Liberals are concerned about Mr. Dion's personal public opinion polling numbers, but others say not to underestimate Mr. Dion. The Conservatives, meanwhile are breaking much-needed ground in Ontario, recent polls indicate.

New Liberal Leader Dion has new 'leaderitis,' says SES pollster Nanos

Conservatives have built on a multi-issue foundation, almost impossible for any one issue to be Achilles heel, says Prof. Bennett

By BEA VONGDOUANGCHANH and ABBAS RANA

Liberal Party Leader Stéphane Dion, who is not faring well in public opinion polls to the concern of many federal Liberals across the country, has new 'leaderitis,' says SES pollster Nik Nanos.

Mr. Nanos says Mr. Dion (Saint-Laurent-Cartierville, Que.) needs critical time for Canadians to get to know him and warns that Conservatives should not overestimate recent polls putting the Tories in majority-government territory.

"If you remember when Stephen Harper was the new leader of the Conservatives, the same complaints that we hear about Stéphane Dion today, were made about Stephen Harper when he first became the Conservative leader. They said he was not aggressive, and he did not get out there, he did not create enough profile, that he was not attacking the Liberals enough, so it's kind of new 'leaderitis,' I guess," Mr.

Nanos told *The Hill Times* last week. "The fact of the matter is, once we actually get into the campaign, Stéphane Dion's name recognition is automatically going to go up because people will be focusing more on the election. I think the Conservatives have to be very careful in over-analysing that Stéphane Dion lacking definition [means] lacking support, because those are two completely different things."

An Angus Reid poll released last week indicated that Mr. Dion's (Saint-Laurent-Cartierville, Que.) image has taken "a beating," and that it's not getting any better. The poll, taken online between March 6 and 7, found that only 19 per cent of Canadians thought Mr. Dion would make the best prime minister, compared to 35 per cent for Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, Alta.). Moreover, only nine per cent of respondents said he was improving, compared to 21 per cent from Mr. Harper. Twenty nine per cent said Mr. Dion's image got worse while only 22 per cent said the same about Mr. Harper.

When it comes to the ballot question, the poll found that 38 per cent of Canadians would vote for the Conservatives led by Mr. Harper if an election were held while 28 per cent would vote for the Liberal Party led by Mr. Dion. The poll was conducted with 1,059 Canadian adults and has a margin of error of three per cent, 19 times out of 20. An earlier online Angus Reid poll indicated that the Conservatives had 40 per cent of the support of the Canadian voters while the Liberals had 26 per cent. Other polls by Decima Research in recent weeks put the Conservatives ahead of the Liberals 36 to 27 per cent, while polling firm Ipsos-Reid had the Conservatives

ahead of the Liberals 36 to 32 per cent.

Mr. Nanos said that SES's own research shows that there's not a "huge lead" for the Tories and that there hasn't been anything happening on the federal political landscape that would warrant a 14-point or 10-point spread between the Conservatives and the Liberals.

"A 14-point lead is in effect a majority government. I think one of the things that was interesting about the Angus Reid survey that had the Liberals in 26 per cent which is lower than what I'll say is a doomsday scenario of John Turner against Brian Mulroney is that the Liberals were wiped out in 1984, and they still won 26 per cent of the vote," Mr. Nanos said. "We have polls showing them at 26. I'm not sure if it's that bad for the Liberals. I don't really see that there have been any dramatic developments on the political landscape to merit a major advantage for the Conservatives over the Liberals. ... It does show that some of the underlying variables for the Conservatives look positive, such as the perceptions of the Prime Minister, comfort with a majority Conservative government. Those types of things that are potentially indicators of future movement."

Conservative strategist Tim Powers, a consultant with Summa Strategies, said it's a positive sign for the Conservatives to be polling so high in between elections, even if reaching 40 per cent support is just a one-time thing. "Historically, in between elections, the Conservative Party doesn't poll extremely high. So, the fact that we're polling at a number equivalent to what we won the last election with is not a bad thing," Mr. Powers said. "I don't think you'll ever see the Conservative Party in pre-elec-

tion polls constantly in the 40s, it's just never how it's worked historically because historically, the Liberal Party has been seen as the place where you park your opinion in between elections and the Conservative Party is the party you vote for when you want to get things done."

Mr. Nanos said there could be different factors that attribute to the polling numbers, including the other questions on the survey, the order of the questions, and the online versus telephone survey.

Carleton University political science professor Scott Bennett, who specializes in quantitative research methods, said that while there are differences in online and telephone surveys, both can be equally accurate.

"Originally, it was thought that web polls might be less representative because there is a demographic bias in the availability of connections to the web. Yet, it is important to distinguish between one off web polls and early web polling on the one hand, and modern, carefully-recruited web panels or web-sampling frames. Some companies have refined this sort of carefully constructed web sampling to a high degree," he told *The Hill Times* in an email. "Furthermore, it is quite common to weigh results from web polling to at least partially make up for any demographic biases in the distribution of personal web access. So, I don't think well done web polling is necessarily worse in terms of sampling than computer assisted telephone interviewing, which can have its own problems. However, I do not have the details of how Angus Reid manages their sample. They may be doing a high quality job, but one needs to

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Tories 'totally outmanoeuvred' Liberals, says a polling expert

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have more details on their procedures. In general, we will see more web based polling in the next few years, and, if it is done well and based on a properly recruited sampling frame and weighted results, it can be quite useful."

Mr. Nanos said the Liberal Party brand is still "tarnished" in Quebec, which could also be why the numbers have not been good to the party. "Outside of Quebec, it's still pretty resilient but, especially in the province of Quebec, I don't think they're out of the woods yet," he said. "We haven't seen the Quebec numbers for the Liberals really significantly improve."

Political players, however, have other reasons for the polling numbers.

Liberal MP Joe McGuire (Egmont, P.E.I.) in an interview with *The Hill Times* said that the Conservative Party's negative ads played a key role in Liberal Party's decline in the recent public opinion polling numbers.

He said that Liberals should either return the fire with negative ads about Prime Minister Harper or should launch positive ads about their own leader.

"We've been negligent in putting forth a positive image of our leader, we basically have done nothing to counteract negative advertising and if the people in OLO think that it [negative ads] just doesn't work, they should wake up because it does work, negative advertising does work. We have to either counter it with our own negative advertising which will be very easy to do or counter it with some positive advertising."

Mr. McGuire, however, said he's confident that Liberals can win the next election because once Canadians get to know the new Liberal leader more, they will feel compelled to vote for him.

"I don't see why not. Mr. Dion is a principled man, he's an honest man, that will come through and Canadians will understand that this man who's been in federal politics basically, he's a strong believer in this country, in a united country, he knows how to keep this country united. His ideas are very clear, he knows what's provincial jurisdiction, what's federal jurisdiction," he said.

"The Liberals will do very well. The more Mr. Dion gets out into small town Canada into big town Canada, when they see him in person and they take the time to see what he stands for, they will see a man they can put their trust in."

Former Liberal MP Joe Jordan, who was an early supporter of Mr. Dion's in the leadership race, also said that the negative ads worked but doesn't expect Mr. Dion to fire back negatively. "This is not a strategy, this is who Stéphane Dion is," Mr. Jordan said, referring to the fact that Mr. Dion has said publicly he will not go down the negative ad route. "He believes that the job of somebody who's in public policy is to concentrate on public policy. ... I think it's going to take some time for Canadians to realize that he's not going to provide three second solutions to extremely complicated and complex problems, as much as there may be some political attraction to that, he's just not going to do that. He's not going to go there. I wouldn't expect a new Stéphane Dion to appear in front of the curtain all of a sudden who's got all the lines and all the political sass. That's not who he is. That's not who he'll ever be. The challenge for the Liberals, given the numbers where they are, is to make sure that our communications underscores the strength that we have in this leader. Is that easy? It's not, because he's swimming upstream on some of this stuff, so what do they need? I think they need time."

The polls indicate that that "jury is still

out on Dion," Mr. Jordan said. "The good news is that they find him honest, they find him sincere. Those are pretty good building blocks. There's nothing in these polls that can't be addressed. I think the bottom line is that I think the Liberal Party needs the time to find its feet."

Mr. Powers also said that the Liberal numbers are down because of the internal party strife. "The bigger problem for the Liberals is less the public opinion polls right now than the friendly fire incidents that they are subject to. Having gone through this in the Conservative Party, friendly fire can be more unsettling than public opinion polls. We had again this week Christine Stewart, former environment minister come out and challenge Mr. Dion's commitment to Kyoto. David Anderson, the former environment minister has already done this. Eddie Goldenberg stated quite definitively [that] during his tenure the Liberals were never going to [meet] the Kyoto targets. So, it's that internal stuff that hurts the Liberals. The Liberal Party never is going to tank, per se, they are too strong of an electoral machine but they're having their challenges."

But, credit also has to go to the Conservatives, for the increase in its numbers, Prof. Bennett said, pointing to the fact that they have managed public policy issues well. "If the Conservatives are gaining momentum and if they have passed a critical threshold, this is due to their management of a whole portfolio of issues, and these issues have all had some link to perceptions of Mr. Harper's leadership," he said, adding that the government has done well on justice, fiscal affairs and inter-governmental affairs issues. "One should also note that there has been more public awareness of disagreements within the Liberal party regarding such issues as renewal of security measures. This has not helped Liberal leadership scores. The Conservatives have also displayed some leadership and gained some degree of trust in other areas where voter intentions are fragmented in a more problematic way, for example, defence, external affairs and the environment. I cannot stress enough how well the Conservatives have built on a multi-issue foundation. Furthermore, they have made it almost impossible for any one issue to be their Achilles heel."

Prof. Bennett said that the Conservatives have "totally out manoeuvred" the Liberals in terms of defining "any major contours in Canadian policy space." He said that the Liberals' numbers aren't necessarily a reflection of Mr. Dion's leadership style but rather, the Conservatives have been successful in issue management. "It is true he does not come across well as a media personality in many parts of Canada," Prof. Bennett said. "Still, the real story here is that the Conservatives have moved on to the next level of multi-dimensional issue management, and the Liberals, not just Mr. Dion, are stuck in an older mode of campaign design and issue management. It will be difficult for them to improve, but it is not completely impossible. Mr. Dion is not helping his party much, but they also seem to be stuck in patterns that don't help him."

At the end of the day, however, Mr. Powers said that polls don't mean that much. They come and go, he said. "If you're asking how it relates to election or election speculation, that's a thing that's driven more by commentators, there seems to be a lot of outside commentary that there'll be an election based on these polls but the reality is that the Prime Minister is very strong in saying that there doesn't need to be an election now and he wants to govern."

bvongdou@hilltimes.com
arana@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

POLITICS NEWS BRIEFS

What happened to lobbyists registrar Nelson's reports?

The four reports of Lobbyists Registrar **Michael Nelson** that are to be tabled in Parliament are now in the hands of Treasury Board President **Vic Toews** (Provencher, Man.) for tabling in Parliament.

Last year, Mr. Nelson said he intended to table four investigative reports relating to the activities of a lobbyist, **Neelam Makhija**, and his consulting work for clients seeking funding under the Technology Partnerships Canada program. The registrar was expected to table



Treasury Board President Vic Toews.

them in Parliament early in the new year, but when they were not, some began to wonder where they went.

"The four reports were completed early in February and each of the four reports had to be edited, translated and published," **Stéphanie Leblanc**, a spokesperson for the registrar, said last week. She said the reports have been filed with Mr. Toews, who has 15 days to table them in the House and Senate.—*Simon Doyle*

EA to Grit MP Steckle to seek Liberal nomination in Huron-Bruce

Greg McClinchey, executive assistant to Liberal MP **Paul Steckle**, is seeking the Liberal nomination in his boss's of Huron-Bruce, Ont.

Mr. Steckle is not running again. So far, Mr. McClinchey is the only interested Grit in the nomination. Mr. Steckle told *The Hill Times* he will support Mr. McClinchey's nomination.

Mr. McClinchey, 30, was born in Clinton, Ont. and is a ninth generation resident of the Huron County in southwestern Ontario.

He first started working for Mr. Steckle in 1993 and later on moved to Ottawa to serve as Mr. Steckle's executive assistant on Parliament Hill. He also served as Mr. Steckle's campaign manager in the 2000, 2004 and 2006 federal elections. In 2006, Mr. McClinchey was elected as a municipal councillor in North Huron, Ont. He is also author of the upcoming book, *Stickin' To His Guns*, a biography on Mr. Steckle that "provides a through-the-keyhole look at the private elements of Paul Steckle's public life."—*Abbas Rana*

More women needed in Parliament: Equal Voice

With only 21 per cent of women in the House of Commons, Equal Voice, an advocacy group focused on electing more women to Parliament, challenged the federal political leaders to increase the number of women running for their parties in the next federal election.

"Political parties are the gatekeepers to the House of Commons and they need to be proactive in recruiting and supporting women candidates to run in winnable ridings," Equal Voice national chair **Raylene Lang-Dion** said last week.

Members of the Equal Voice advisory board, **Kim Campbell**, Canada's first female prime minister, **Judy Erola**, a former Liberal MP who served as minister responsible for the Status of Women,



Status of Women Minister Bev Oda

former NDP leader **Audrey McLaughlin**, the first woman to serve as the leader of a federal political party in Canada and Conservative Senator **Pat Carney**, the first woman to have served as Canada's Minister of Energy and Mines, Minister of International Trade and President of Treasury Board, issued the challenge last week, on International Women's Day.

Since 1867, 264 women have served in Parliament, 190 MPs and 74 Senators.

Elsewhere on International Women's Day, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, one of the biggest unions in the federal public service, staged a sit-in at Heritage Minister and Minister responsible for the Status of Women **Bev Oda's** constituency office in Bowmanville, Ont.

The union was protesting the \$5-million funding cut to the Status of Women department in last year's budget. "Harper and company are actively ignoring women's inequality," PSAC regional executive vice-president for Ontario **Gerry Halabecki** said. "By undermining women's groups who do research and advocacy work, they hope to bury the very real problems facing women in Canadian society."

Ms. Oda, however, announced \$5-million in funding for women's programs, such as a new Women's Community Fund and the Women's Partnership Fund which will go toward projects at the local, regional and national level "in order to enable the full participation of women in all aspects of Canadian life" and to give grants to organizations and public institutions addressing women's issues. "We want to work together to improve the lives of women," Ms. Oda said. "This means more money and more projects aimed directly at helping women in their communities in an accountable and efficient way."

PSAC said the announcement would not prevent scheduled closures of Status of Women offices across the country or restore lost jobs.—*Bea Vongdouangchanh*

Conrad Black shirts pop up in T.O.

After designing T-shirts that said "Free Conrad"—yes, **Conrad Black**, the media magnate who renounced his Canadian citizenship to become Lord of Crossharbour in Britain—in the late summer of 2006, Toronto graphic designer **Wendy Tancock** received a call from Mr. Black himself looking for his own custom shirt.

The result? He ordered 150 shirts that say "Conrad Will Win." This is of course all in reference to Mr. Black's trial currently underway in a Chicago court room. Mr. Black is charged with mail fraud, wire fraud, racketeering, obstruction of justice and money laundering, all to which he has pleaded not guilty. Mr. Black faces a maximum of 95 years in jail if convicted on all charges.

Ms. Tancock said she doesn't know what Mr. Black is doing with the T-shirts, but speculated that he gives them to friends and supporters or as gifts to family members. They are for sale for \$24.95 but she said she doesn't suspect he's trying to raise funds for his legal defence.

A recent Angus Reid Strategies poll released last week, found that 56 per cent of Canadians are following the trial and 59 per cent said they would not feel sorry for Mr. Black if he were convicted. Only eight per cent of Canadians said they would feel sorry for him. "The fact that Mr. Black renounced his Canadian citizenship might have affected his standing, despite the evident charm campaign that has taken place over the past few months," said **Angus Reid**,

CEO of Angus Reid Strategies, in a press release. —*Bea Vongdouangchanh*

