

POLITICS PAGE

Government shouldn't trust Kroeker: Liberal Sen. Hervieux-Payette

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, **Céline Hervieux-Payette**, is questioning how the Conservatives can continue to trust **Jeffrey Kroeker** to work for a secretary of state after a Senate committee unanimously reported that he behaved improperly and unethically.

"How can we trust this person, if this person is willing to play games and destroy your reputation?" Quebec Sen. **Hervieux-Payette** said in an interview last week, referring to Mr. Kroeker's new employment in the office of **Helena Guergis**, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Leader of the Government in the Senate, **Marjory LeBreton**, defended Mr. Kroeker, her staffer, last fall when he faced allegations of leaking hotel bills and other confidential information about the Senate National Defence Committee's trip to Dubai.

"There were reputations of individuals at stake. This person is holding a job with a Cabinet minister," Sen. **Hervieux-Payette** said.

The Senate Internal Economy Committee investigated the leak and called Mr. Kroeker before it to testify, where he admitted to leaking the information but said he did it on his own and without the direction or approval of Sen. **LeBreton**. Sen. **LeBreton** also says she had no knowledge of Mr. Kroeker's activities.

The 15-member Senate committee unanimously reported last week that Mr. Kroeker's conduct was inappropriate and unethical and breached Senate

rules. Sen. **Hervieux-Payette** said that Mr. Kroeker could be found in breach of trust.

Last week, Environment Canada contract worker **Jeffrey Monaghan** was arrested and led away in handcuffs for allegedly leaking the government's climate change plan. The RCMP questioned him for breach of trust but no charges were laid.

He lost his job, and at a news conference on the Hill, said his arrest was "a threat to the public interest" and part of a government-wide communications strategy founded on secrecy, intimidation and centralization.—*Simon Doyle*

Liberals lead Conservatives by one point in latest SES poll

The Conservatives have lost four per cent of support in the most recent SES poll, showing a drop from 36 per cent to 32 per cent. The Liberals lead by one point.

Liberals say it's because the government has handled a number of files poorly and contrary to what Canadians want.

"I think that reflects two things," Liberal House Leader **Ralph Goodale** said. "The government is in trouble on a number of issues, its budget has not been a success. Afghanistan has gone badly for the government, climate change has gone badly for the government, their justice agenda has not worked, their democratic reform agenda has not worked, so I think the poll numbers indicate a government with increasing difficulties on issues."

The other reason is psychological, Mr. **Goodale** said. "Whenever Mr. Harper

appears to be getting close to the majority-government range in the 40 per cent range, Canadians immediately recoil and head in the other direction. There is something fundamentally unsettling for a majority of Canadians about the notion that Stephen Harper might win another election and whatever the polls tend to indicate that something's happening in that direction, Canadians reject it and the Conservative numbers go down."

SES pollster **Nik Nanos** agreed that the numbers could be issues-based. "A combination of factors have been at play in the past month including focus on the new Conservative environmental plan and a greater focus on the Afghanistan Mission. This all adds up to a political statement," he wrote on his blog, 'Nik on the Numbers,' last week. "Since the election of the Harper government, there has been a correlation between the issues and party support. When the public is focused on domestic issues, the Tory numbers move up and the focus is foreign policy, code, Afghanistan, the Tory numbers slide. This is especially true in the province of Quebec, one of the key battlegrounds."

Chief Government Whip **Jay Hill** said he's not putting any stock in the polls. "We've gotten to a point where the pollsters are polling, it seems like, on a weekly basis now. If you remember a year ago, they didn't poll hardly at all. We would go six months without a poll and now it seems like every week that a new poll comes out. It depends on which polling company it is, what questions they ask, what kind of response they get. I don't believe that we're doing as poorly as some of the polls show. If

the opposition takes heart in it, well good for them," he said.

Conservative MP **Deepak Ohbrai**, Parliamentary secretary to Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, said he also doesn't pay much attention to polls and that his government is handling the Afghanistan situation well. "The best poll is the poll on the day of the election. Canada in Afghanistan is naturally an issue but has nothing to do with the polls," he said.

Meanwhile, although the polls show a decrease for the government, both the Liberals and the Tories believe the election fever has died down.

"Actually I don't see the possibility of an election for awhile," Conservative MP **Tom Lukiwski** said. "We've consistently stated that we want to continue to govern. We had no interest in calling an early election and I continue to say that the timing of the next election will be solely up to the combined opposition. When they decide they want an election, that's when Canadians will be going back to the polls."

The only other automatic confidence vote will be on the last supply day in June when the main estimates are dealt with. Mr. **Goodale** said the Bloc Québécois will support the government no matter what, so a late spring election is not likely. "The practical reality is the Bloc will be in the government's pocket until they settle their leadership issues," he said.

The poll also showed that that the NDP have 17 per cent, the Greens have 10 per cent and the Bloc have nine per cent support.—*Bea Vongdouangchanh*

Continued on Page 46

The Hill. Foreign Policy. Every Week.

Enjoy Canada's best coverage of federal politics and foreign policy with convenient delivery to your home or office—now for one low price. Get one year/50 issues of **The Hill Times & EMBASSY**, for only \$199, a savings of \$92.66 off the cover price.

For a no-obligation subscription, contact Sabrina Pomeroy at 613-232-5952 x209, or email: circulation@hilltimes.com

THE HILL TIMES **EMBASSY**
Canada's Politics and Government Newsweekly CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEWSWEEKLY

