

LIBERAL LEADERSHIP SPECIAL

By BEA VONGDOUANGCHANH

Twenty two point two per cent of Canadians say they “like nothing” about the Liberal Party of Canada, while 33.2 per cent believe the party is “corrupt,” according an SES Research poll released last week, but Liberal MPs aren’t too worried about the negative feedback they’re getting.

“Obviously we are in the process of recovering from previous difficulties,” Liberal House Leader Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Sask.) told *The Hill Times*. “We have substantially turned a corner on that. We never take it for granted. You always have to work at it.”

Mr. Goodale said he’s still proud to be a Liberal despite the fact that only 16.2 per cent of survey respondents like Liberal policies because they are “moderate” and “flexible.” He said the Liberal brand is changing and it can be seen in the same polls that have the Liberals ahead of the Conservatives but statistically tied. “I’m very proud to be a Liberal,” he said. “I’ve worked very hard for this party all my life. I know what the party has accomplished. Obviously no one is perfect and we went through a period from which we need to recover. It is interesting though that when you get to the issue of if there was an election, how would you vote, the same polls say we’re tied with the Conservatives. Work has to be done.”

He said the party cannot take anything for granted and is working on building public trust through “good governance, good policy, good behaviour, a good leadership process and a good performance in the House.”

The SES poll asked 1,002 Canadians 18 years and older “What words would you use to describe what you like, if anything, about the Liberal Party of Canada?” According to the poll, 7.9 per cent of respondents answered that they are “as good as any other party,” while 5.4 per cent said they’re “a good alternative.” Four point eight per cent of respondents said the party is “getting better”

SES poll finds 22.2% ‘like nothing’ about federal Liberals

But a Decima poll recently found Liberals ahead of Conservatives nationally at 33 % compared to Tories who were at 31 %

and “trying to change.” Three per cent said the party “reflects society” and is “pan-Canadian.” Other reasons cited for liking the Liberal Party included “has a long history,” “has a vision for future,” “always has the best leaders,” “stand up for the people,” “democratic,” and “they are pro-business.”

Two people, or 0.02 per cent, said they like the Liberal Party because of Bob Rae and one person, 0.01 per cent, said they liked it because of Paul Martin.

The second question the survey asked was, “What words would you use to describe what you dislike, if anything, about the Liberal Party of Canada?” While 33.2 per cent overall said the Liberal Party was corrupt or scandal-ridden, 34.1 per cent of those who voted Liberal in the last election said they disliked the Liberal

Party for that reason, compared to 35.5 per cent who voted Conservative and 34.7 per cent who voted NDP. In Quebec, 34.2 per cent of those who voted Bloc Québécois said the Liberal Party was corrupt.

Other reasons people disliked the Liberal Party was because it was “arrogant/haven’t changed,” “leadership divisions/disorganized,” “bad policies,” “never fulfills promises,” “not accountable, weak or bad government,” “everything,” “too pro-business,” “favouritism towards Quebec,” “fiscally irresponsible/spend too much,” “too federalist/centralizing,” “power centralized with leader,” and “gun registry.” One person, 0.01 per cent, said they disliked the party because of Bob Rae and one person, 0.01 per cent, said it was because of Jean Chrétien.

In his blog, SES pollster Nik Nanos

wrote that there are still some “bigger issues with the Liberal ‘brand’ because Canadians still have negative connotations associated with the party. “The fact that one in every three Canadians, unprompted, used words like ‘corrupt’ and ‘scandal’ to describe the Liberals shows that the Liberal image has not recovered from the sponsorship scandal,” he said. “The Liberals have a steep mountain to climb to get over this challenge. Although the Liberals will have a new leader, a key question Canadians will likely ask is, how will this new leader be a break with the past?”

Liberal MP Alan Tonks (York South-Weston, Ont.) told *The Hill Times* that he doesn’t believe in the Liberal “stereotypes,” although he said he understands where Canadians are coming from. “I think it’s regrettable that people have that cynical attitude toward politics,” he said in an interview last week. “There’s no question that there were serious lapses of judgment. ... Because of those things that have occurred, the party has worked to try to win the confidence back. I’m hoping that the stereotype that exists, if it exists, that we can take serious steps to correct it and show what we stand for and that is to do our very best in public service, unfettered by any conflicts that would place the public’s trust in jeopardy.”

He said the leadership convention will be a good time to discuss renewal and put it into action. He said Liberals should use the convention “to re-establish our interdependence with our party and members” and to develop new policies which will reflect new ideas coming from the membership. “I’m very optimistic that the process will play itself out in a very positive way,” he said.

Liberal MP Navdeep Bains (Mississauga-Brampton South, Ont.) told *The Hill Times* that he believed it wasn’t only necessarily the Liberal Party taking heat, but that the public doesn’t regard politicians highly. “There’s a feeling out there that people underrate what we do and what we stand for. We’re partially to blame for that. Not Liberals, but all politicians are because of our antics in the House of Commons sometimes. People who come here don’t understand why we’re so partisan at times,” he said, adding that he feels good about the upcoming convention because it will be a time to move on.

In a recent SES poll, the Conservatives led the Liberals by two points. Thirty four per cent of Canadians would have voted Conservative if an election were held between Nov. 5-9, while 32 per cent would have voted Liberal. In Quebec, the poll shows a Liberal lead by 13 points. The Liberals hold 25 per cent support in the province, compared to the Conservatives’ 12 per cent. In Ontario, the Liberals hold their lead by eight points with 44 per cent, compared to 36 per cent for the Conservatives. In the West, the Conservatives lead with 48 per cent support while the Liberals hold 25 per cent. The poll is accurate to within 3.3 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

In a similar poll conducted by Decima between Nov. 9-13 with 1,126 Canadians, however, the Liberals were ahead of the Conservatives nationally at 33 per cent compared to the Conservatives’ 31 per cent. In Quebec, the Liberals maintained their traditional lead over the Conservatives with 26 per cent support as opposed to the Conservatives’ 12 per cent. In Ontario, the Liberals led the Conservatives by one per cent—38 per cent would vote Liberal and 37 would vote Conservative. In Alberta, however, the Conservatives take a commanding lead, with 49 per cent support whereas the Liberals only hold 23 per cent support. The poll is accurate to 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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