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Mon, February 2, 2004

Voters lukewarm on PM

Throne speech critical as poll finds Canadians 'aren't really hot' on Grits

By BILL RODGERS, Parliamentary Bureau

CANADIANS give Paul Martin's government an average grade, but their love affair with the Liberals continues unabated, according to a SES/Sun Media poll.

The survey of 1,000 Canadians taken from Jan. 26-29 shows 35% rate the new Martin government's performance as average, while another 23% are undecided.

"Half of Canadians aren't really hot on this government," said SES president Nik Nanos. He believes that perception could be a weak spot as the Martin Grits head into an election later this year.

"People like Paul Martin and people like the Liberals compared to the Conservative Party, at least at this point, but they're not as thrilled about the actual performance of the Liberal government."

TURNING POINT

Nanos said it is critical for Martin to tackle the issue during the new session of Parliament.



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"This Throne Speech (today) is very important for Paul Martin in regards to turning around the performance numbers."

The poll showed only 6% of Canadians believe the government is doing a very good job; 24% said the performance was somewhat good and 13% rated the government's performance as poor or very poor.

When asked who would make the best prime minister, the survey put Paul Martin at the top of the list by a whopping 50%. Lagging far behind at 8% was Conservative leadership candidate Stephen Harper and NDP Leader Jack Layton at 5%. Another 26% of the electorate was undecided and 6% didn't like any of the current political leaders.

The poll indicates that, if an election were held today, the Grits would take 48% of popular support, the Conservatives have jumped to 23% and the New Democrats are at 15%. The separatist Bloc Quebecois is at 11% nationally, based on its support in Quebec, and the Green Party picks up 3%.

GRITS IN THE LEAD

Martin's Liberals lead their political opponents across all regions of the country including the West, where all three parties show some strength. The Liberals are at 41%, the Conservatives at 33% and the NDP is running at 22%.

Conservative House leader Loyola Hearn sees a silver lining in the polling numbers for his newly-merged party.

"Our party's at 23% when nobody knows who's going to lead it. They really haven't seen our policies yet."

Hearn believes that when Canadians have a point of comparison they will recognize that the Grits are selling "the tired old, same old stuff." He noted that almost a quarter of Canadians are undecided. "That's a lot."

The SES/Sun Media poll is accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, plus

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