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Thu, November 13, 2003

PM's legacy elusive: Poll Defining accomplishment hard to find

By BILL RODGERS, Parliamentary Bureau

A MAJORITY of Canadians can't cite a single accomplishment for Jean Chretien as his 10 years in office come to a close, an SES/Sun Media poll has found. Asked to name his top three accomplishments as PM, 51% of 1,000 Canadians surveyed couldn't name one.

Refusing to send Canadian troops to war in Iraq was mentioned as an important accomplishment by 11% of Canadians surveyed. Almost 10% said Chretien doesn't have a legacy while 8.9% said eliminating the deficit would be remembered as his biggest political achievement.

At a Liberal gathering in Brantford two months ago, Chretien suggested that calming the separatist storm in Quebec was one of his greatest accomplishments.

"One thing that I'm most proud of is that Canada has never been so united as it is today," he said.

But in the SES/Sun Media poll, only 4.4% cited keeping the country together as Chretien's greatest achievement during his decade in office.



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SES pollster Nic Nanos said while Chretien's personal popularity remains high among Canadians, he is regarded by most as a good manager, not a visionary.

"There's usually one major accomplishment that people can think of," said Nanos. "For Mulroney it was free trade, for Pierre Trudeau it was the Charter (of Rights and Freedoms), for Lester Pearson it was his foreign policy."

Nanos said one of the reasons Chretien and the Liberals have been so popular is because "they haven't taken any risks and they've been rewarded at the polls."

"The trade-off," he added, "is that by running the safe course, there's no key accomplishment or legacy for the government."

Nanos said the PM gets very little credit for slaying the federal government's annual deficits because most Canadians see it as a joint accomplishment with Paul Martin, his successor.

A small percentage of Canadians gave the retiring PM credit for foreign policy, winning three consecutive majority governments, economic growth and increased health care funding.

The SES/Sun Media poll was conducted by telephone between Nov. 5 and 9 and is accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

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