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November 14, 2003

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November 14, 2003

## PM takes credit for everything

By GREG WESTON -- Sun Media



TORONTO -- "He did it his way." With the latest Sun Media poll showing a majority of Canadians entirely missed the making of Jean Chretien's legacy, his political epitaph was neatly captured in the five-word refrain of Paul Anka's crooning tribute to the prime minister here last night.

The Las Vegas entertainer clearly hit a chord with his adaptation of the Frank Sinatra hit, My Way, bringing tears and cheers to the 7,000-odd Liberals gathered for the PM's farewell tribute.

Whatever else can be said about the Little Guy from Shawinigan who became the Big Shot in Ottawa, there never has been, nor is there ever likely to be, another like him.

He did it his way, all right. Of that, there can be no doubt.

But as Chretien prepares to take his final shrug on the public stage, the big question is not so much how he did his 10 years in power, but what he did.

To hear Chretien tell the story in a somewhat stunning farewell tribute to himself last evening, his decade at the nation's helm has been nothing short of heroic, rescuing a floundering country from assorted brinks of unthinkable disasters.

"We remember the state of the nation 10 years ago," Chretien said. "Canadians remember it. I know I will never forget it."

Never one to let the truth get in the way of good hyperbole, Chretien continued: "We were in crisis, all right. The worst crisis Canada had seen in more than half a century. An economic crisis. A fiscal crisis. A national unity crisis. And even more troubling, a crisis of confidence."



#### SUN SPECIALS



"Canadians had given up believing Canada could ever work again ... Canada was on the brink of disaster, of falling apart ... people were giving up -- actually giving up -- on the very idea of Canada."

All of which naturally comes as somewhat of a surprise to those of us who were evidently inhabiting some other planet 10 years ago in 1993.

That was the year Tory Leader Brian Mulroney stepped down and Kim Campbell took over briefly until the election that brought Chretien and the Grits to power.

The country was so close to doomsday, the citizenry so desperate and hopeless, that public opinion polls showed the Tories remained more popular than Chretien's Liberals for months right up to the final weeks of the election.

No matter, Chretien used his farewell speech to congratulate himself for everything from eliminating the deficit to slashing taxes, from saving education to saving the country from separatism.

"Restoring the pride, restoring the faith of Canadians has been a big job, my friends."

Gosh, such huge achievements for such a modest millionaire.

So, how come so many of us missed them until last night?

The SES/Sun Media poll published this week found more than half the Canadians surveyed could not name a single accomplishment for Chretien, and over 90% could not name three significant achievements during his decade in power.

Even on specific issues -- eliminating the deficit, keeping the country together, foreign policy, economic growth -- Chretien received only minimal recognition.

There are only two explanations: Either Chretien's legacy is that he doesn't have one; or Canadians didn't notice his many achievements.

Both are equally disturbing.

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Sun Media Newspapers

If a majority of Canadians cannot name a single achievement of their prime minister after a full decade in power, it surely suggests that record numbers of citizens have simply tuned out and turned off politics and governance.

This is the real stuff of Chretien's legacy, born of years of turning a blind eye to the sleaze and corruption around him, to the patronage and privilege bestowed on party pals. The result is he leaves behind a citizenry rife with cynicism toward high office and mistrust in our public institutions.

A citizenry that ultimately withdraws from the democratic process, a citizenry that simply stays home in record numbers on voting day.

A citizenry that doesn't know what its prime minister achieved, and apparently doesn't much care.

But, hey, he did it his way.



E-MAIL TO A FRIEND

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