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CA leader ready to challenge PM But says: 'I'm not going to be a mudslinger'

By [STEPHANIE RUBEC](#)-- Sun Media

The Canadian Alliance's new leader Stephen Harper will take his first swing at the Liberals in the Commons today, at a time when the Grits are under attack over allegations of corruption.

But Harper said he won't be hurling insults, he'll tone down Question Period and adopt the solemn style favoured by Deputy Prime Minister John Manley.

"I'm not going to be a mudslinger and a rat packer," Harper said, referring to the group of Liberal ministers who were aggressive and very vocal critics as opposition MPs in the '80s. "I suspect I'm a bit rusty and will have a learning curve, but my style, I hope, will be thoughtful and it will be intelligent."

Harper will be sworn in today as the Leader of the Opposition, the eighth to face Prime Minister Jean Chretien since he took power in 1993.

He did have a chance to take on the PM in the Commons as a Reform MP from 1993-1997, before he quit the party after a falling out with then-leader Preston Manning.

Harper, 43, enters the ring at a time when the Liberals are bombarded daily by allegations of corruption and kickbacks.

Only last week a new poll by the Liberals' own pollster found 45% of Canadians believe the Chretien government is corrupt. However, another poll by SES Research found that 49% of voters support the Grits.

Chretien will have to tackle the corruption charges personally today, having benefitted from a 10-day reprieve while he toured Europe.

During his absence, Manley was forced to manage the bombshell dropped by Auditor General Sheila Fraser May 7.

The AG concluded the Liberals paid Montreal-based ad agency Groupaction three times -- or \$1.6 million -- for similar reports and called in the RCMP to investigate.

Harper said he's picking through a smorgasbord of issues to tackle today.



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Photo of the Day



"It's not just their scandals and corruption but their basic competence, their leadership and direction," he said. "I think on policy, and particularly lack thereof, they're very vulnerable."

Harper said what's most important is that his party prove to non-western Canadians they're an alternative to the Liberals in the next federal election.



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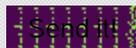
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