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## Lord, McKenna square off in PM poll

### NBers score highly in Canadians' wishlist of future federal leaders

BY DANIEL MCHARDIE  
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

**FREDERICTON** - The possibility of a made-in-New Brunswick federal showdown between U.S. ambassador Frank McKenna and Premier Bernard Lord reared up again yesterday when a national pollster found the two are prime candidates to be the next leaders of their national parties.

SES Research found McKenna, the province's former Liberal premier, is favoured by the majority of Canadians and party members to replace Prime Minister Paul Martin. Meanwhile, Lord is running a close third behind Peter MacKay, the federal party's deputy leader, and former Ontario Premier Mike Harris to take over for Stephen Harper.

Don Desserud, a political science professor at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John, said the SES poll further cements the province's reputation as an incubator for national politicians.

"We have a natural talent for national politics," Desserud said. "The size of the province is similar to a suburb of Toronto but we consistently produce national-calibre politicians."

The polling company found 23 per cent of Canadians identified McKenna as their preferred Martin successor, while 28 per cent of those people calling themselves Liberals backed the former New Brunswick premier. McKenna's support was clear across the country with Ontario the only exception, where former Ontario NDP premier Bob Rae had a small three-point lead on him. Forty-four per cent of Atlantic Canadians opted for McKenna to replace Martin.

On the Conservative side of the House of Commons, the future race to replace Harper is a bit more of a dogfight. MacKay, the Nova Scotia MP and former Progressive Conservative Party leader, is being eyed by 17 per cent of Canadians to be the next Tory leader, followed by former Ontario Premier Mike Harris with 15 per cent and Lord at 13 per cent.

While MacKay has a broad level of support across the country, Lord, on the other hand, has concentrated popularity in key pockets, mostly Atlantic

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Canada and Quebec. The New Brunswick premier leads in Atlantic Canada with 27 per cent compared to MacKay's 23 per cent and in Quebec Lord has 24 per cent popularity compared to Harris's 15 per cent.

Luc Ouellet, a Quebec City Conservative organizer, said many local riding association presidents are unhappy with the direction Harper is steering the party and are eager to get behind a potential Lord candidacy.

"I think (the poll) is interesting because it is the confirmation of the popularity of Bernard Lord in Quebec," Ouellet said. "I think it is a very good result for him and I think the people from Quebec appreciate the kind of Bernard Lord vision and how he is very close to the people and I think it is very interesting at this time." The Quebec Tory said MacKay has a lot of name recognition around the country because of his stature within the party and he doesn't believe Lord would have any problem catching up if a leadership race were called.

Tom Bateman, a political science professor at St. Thomas University, said he was surprised at MacKay's popularity. Bateman said many consider MacKay tainted after reneging on a controversial deal he made with David Orchard at the PC leadership convention that he would not allow the party to merge with the former Canadian Alliance.

The political scientist issued a warning to all political leaders identified by the poll.

"I wouldn't take any of these numbers to the bank," Bateman said.

While both McKenna and Lord score high on potential leadership lists, neither of their parties has a vacancy yet. Although there is a perception that both Martin and Harper may be forced to resign after the upcoming federal election if their parties do not meet expectations.

McKenna's position as Canada's ambassador to the United States has given him a national profile as he's tackled issues such as softwood lumber, mad cow disease and the Devils Lake squabble between Manitoba and North Dakota.

"What happens when you are in a position of prominence like premier, people get to know you but they forget about you quickly when you leave," UNB's Desserud said.

"(Being U.S. ambassador) gives him credibility in being a person who can stand up for the country as a whole or represent the country as a whole, which has always been a problem for a premier." Nik Nanos, president of SES, said the prominence of McKenna and Lord shouldn't be a surprise.

"I don't think it is a surprise in Canada's only officially bilingual province that it is a great training ground for future prime ministers," Nanos said.

"Both former premier Frank McKenna and premier Bernard Lord have key touchstones that Canadians want as their prime minister." The SES Research study contacted 1,000 Canadians between Aug. 4 and 8 and has a margin of error of 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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