

## **Personal problems take toll in polls**

Appointment, marital troubles to blame for drop: Premier  
By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter



Premier Rodney MacDonald acknowledged Thursday that his marital troubles and a controversial appointment are likely reasons why his popularity has sunk in polls done after the June election.

Observers had speculated the personal problems, first reported in August after an election campaign promoting families, played a role in the numbers dropping, and Mr. MacDonald said that's probably the case.

"You're right, I would say that it has affected my numbers during the past year," he said on radio station News 95.7.

"But that being said, I have a job to do, I take the job very seriously and I intend to do the best possible job I can."

Mr. MacDonald usually doesn't comment on polls. At least three surveys since the election suggest his and/or his party's popularity have dropped significantly.

He was the choice for premier of 35 per cent of those people Corporate Research Associates polled in late May/early June, was down to 27 per cent in late August, and was at 24 per cent in a poll released Monday.

Those polls found the party's popularity declined from 38 per cent to 35 to 32. A Bristol Group poll completed Dec. 1 had the Tories at 26 per cent.

The party got almost 40 per cent of the popular vote in the June 13 election and won 23 of 52 seats.

Mr. MacDonald said he'd have to see what happens with his family situation in the new year. He said he was at eight-year-old son Ryan's Christmas concert Tuesday night and will be with him opening presents Christmas morning.

The premier also said during his appearance on the radio talk show that he's paid a price for moving Heather Foley Melvin from her post as his chief of staff to head the new agency Conserve Nova Scotia less than two weeks after the election.

"I agree with you that it did cost me," Mr. MacDonald said. "Unfortunately, the way it has gone out in the public is not what I would have hoped for."

Critics attacked the appointment, saying Ms. Foley Melvin's auto sales industry background didn't qualify her for the job, and they wondered why she was moved after just four months as chief of staff. She kept her \$131,613.82 salary.

Mr. MacDonald stood by Ms. Foley Melvin's appointment and said it was no different from appointing a deputy minister. The province's fair hiring policy contained in management manual #500 — Human Resources Management states the government doesn't have to hold a competition for all jobs and "may make appointments to positions outside the civil service, including deputy ministers, chief executive officers of agencies, boards and commissions."

The list doesn't include "chief administrative officer," Ms. Foley Melvin's title. That will change to chief executive officer on Jan. 1.

Interim Liberal Leader Michel Samson said there should be a competition for such an important job.

"She's not the head of any old agency," he said. "Nova Scotians have shown in the last number of years a much greater awareness of the environment, energy consumption and the need to conserve."

New Democrat MLA Frank Corbett said MLAs complained about the appointment in the legislature but it seems Nova Scotians are stuck with Mr. MacDonald's decision for the foreseeable future.

"What bothers me is he didn't have the foresight to see it's not only hurting him, but Nova Scotians, too," Mr. Corbett said.

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