

Tories still sliding, poll finds

Numbers show NDP still on top, Liberals up slightly

By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter

Premier Rodney MacDonald and his Tory party's popularity with Nova Scotians are still sinking, a poll suggests.

Corporate Research Associates' latest quarterly numbers show the Tories are the choice of 32 per cent of decided voters, down three points from August. The New Democrats lead at 37 per cent, same as last time.

Mr. MacDonald is the choice for premier of 24 per cent of those surveyed, also down three points from August. NDP Leader Darrell Dexter slid three points as well, to 31 per cent.

The Liberals were up a point to 26 per cent, and the party's next leader is the choice for premier of 16 per cent, up a point. The Green party is at four per cent.

Corporate Research surveyed 1,621 Nova Scotians between Nov. 9 and Dec. 7. The results are considered accurate within 2.4 percentage points, 95 per cent of the time.

Company president Don Mills said Mr. MacDonald and his party don't seem to have recovered from a rocky start after the June election that included controversy around gas price regulation, Sunday shopping and Mr. MacDonald's marital troubles.

"They were obviously harmed by those two initial issues and I still believe that the premier's personal popularity is affected by his personal life. He's hasn't sort of overcome that part yet, it seems to me," Mr. Mills said Monday.

"They did do some things that were reasonably positive in the last couple of months, but they haven't got much credit for it."

Mr. Mills said those items include a Pharmacare program for children in low-income families, announcements of tuition reduction and more police officers in all municipalities, and the partial HST rebate on home heating fuel that started Dec. 1.

But he said attention on the appointment of Mr. MacDonald's former chief of staff, Heather Foley Melvin, to head Conserve Nova Scotia, which critics called strictly patronage, may have offset some of the positive moves.

And he said some people may have seen making Sundays wide open for shopping as total capitulation on the issue.

Mr. Mills said the Conservatives still seem to be searching for an identity.

"They still have not put their stamp in this government. What does this government stand for? What are its goals and objectives, what's its vision? I think if you ask the average Nova Scotian, they would have no idea how to respond to that question."

Mr. Mills said he thought Mr. Mac-Donald addressed some of that question with a strong state-of-the-province speech a couple of weeks ago that included a commitment for broadband access across Nova Scotia by 2010, but it hasn't sunk in with people yet.

The level of satisfaction with the government fell to 56 per cent from 61 per cent.

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