

## RCMP intervention fingered as turning point in election campaign

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*Monday, March 31, 2008*

OTTAWA - OTTAWA - There may be some debate as to whether the RCMP's intervention in the middle of the 2005-06 election was the decisive blow that finished off the Martin government, but there is no doubt that it had a "negative" impact on the Grits' chances of re-election.

That's one of the conclusions reached by Paul Kennedy, the chairman of the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP, in his report on the force's decision to go public with its investigation of the income trust leak.

"The fact that the RCMP had launched a criminal investigation was immediately introduced into the various political debates as is evident by the NDP press release of Dec. 28, 2005. The loss of public support for the Liberal party as evidenced by the EKOS Voting Polls carried through to election day and resulted in the defeat of the governing party," said the report.

But Kennedy added that it is impossible to determine if the RCMP disclosure was the sole factor to "this dramatic shift in voter support" that was concurrent with the explosive news story.

Pollster Nik Nanos, who says his firm, now called Nanos Research, was the only one tracking party support between Christmas and the new year in 2005, said he has no doubt that the RCMP intervention was the turning point of the election. He said the numbers shifted overnight Dec. 28 when the investigation was made public, adding that the announcement first affected Canadians' trust in Martin, leading to a national drop in Liberal support the following day.

He said the investigation had an especially sharp impact on the Liberals' support in Quebec where their campaign was already struggling because of the sponsorship scandal.

"It reactivated negative perceptions about the Liberals in Quebec and doubled the Conservatives support in the Quebec City region," said Nanos. He said unveiling the investigation also "validated" the attack ads on Liberal ethics being run at the time by the Conservatives.

Certainly the Liberals believe the announcement was a devastating blow to their fortunes.

Former prime minister Paul Martin for instance, in a rare interview in November 2006, hinted broadly that he was looking for answers about the force's intervention: "I certainly will say something at some time on that issue. I don't think I will now. I think we're waiting for the RCMP to say something," Martin told the Toronto Star. "At some point, they're going to have to say something."

David Herle, a key Martin adviser, told Canwest News Service a year ago that "there's no question that the government changed that day" when the RCMP confirmed the investigation. He said overnight it wiped out the Liberals' 15-percentage-point lead over the Tories in Ontario.

Martin wasn't available for comment Monday but former finance minister Ralph Goodale, who was actually named in the RCMP press release confirming the investigation on Dec. 28, 2005, wasn't pulling his punches, saying the "adverse effect" on the Liberals during the election is "inescapable."

Conservative Senator Hugh Segal wrote in his recent book, *The Long Road Back*, that the RCMP "extraordinary" intervention moved the spectre of corruption from the Chretien regime to the Martin government.

"Simply put, it fuelled the 'time for change' sub-theme that can so easily threaten any government of long standing. The precedent of the RCMP engaging in this way should trouble everyone, whether it is seen or experienced negatively or positively, however innocent the RCMP's likely intent," Segal wrote.

Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh, who is the former attorney general of British Columbia, said whether intentional, the RCMP intervention resulted in "political interference" during the election.

He noted that Prime Minister Stephen Harper's first photo-op when he took office in February 2006 was with then-RCMP commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli, the author of the force's press release confirming the damaging investigation.

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