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The Hill Times, August 10, 2009

NDP name change 'significant step,' could send mixed signals and may confuse voters

**Dropping 'new' is grammatically correct, but the 'NDP' is also a brand, says
pollster Nik Nanos.**

By **Abbas Rana**

The New Democratic Party delegates should exercise caution before they decide to drop the adjective "new" from its name as the remaining part may draw a link with the U.S. Democratic Party, which is currently doing well in the public opinion polls, but in the long run, should the U.S. Democratic Party lose its popularity, it may carry

negative consequences for the New Democrats in Canada, says a pollster.

"Democratic Party, nothing wrong with that but they pick up every thing that happens in the States with that. Right now, that's good but it isn't always good. It wasn't great when Jimmy Carter was the president," said pollster Greg Lyle, of Innovative Research in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

At this week's New Democratic Party biennial policy convention in Halifax, N.S., from Aug. 14-16, more than 1,300 delegates will vote on whether the party should drop "new" from its name as the party was founded in 1961 and supporters of the name change argue that after about 50 years of existence, the adjective "new" should be dropped. Five riding associations have put forward resolutions to urge the delegates to consider a name change. Three of these five—Windsor West, Ont., Victoria, B.C. and Western Arctic—want this process completed at the convention while the resolutions of the other two—Ottawa Centre, Ont., and Hull-Aylmer, Que.,—direct the party to undertake consultation to change the name.

Well respected former NDP MP Dick Proctor in an interview said that he supports the idea of dropping "new" from the party name and predicted that it will most likely happen at the convention.

"Everybody agrees that removing the new is probably a good idea after so many years. So my guess is that it'll end up being the Democratic Party when the convention ends," said Mr. Proctor who will not be attending the convention.

He agreed with Mr. Lyle's opinion that in future, if the U.S. Democratic Party took a nosedive in public support which will likely happen at one point or another, it might mean negative consequences for the New Democrats in Canada as well.

"That's a fair point. Everybody is enthusiastic about what's happened in the United States and the victory by Obama last year and all of that but yes, I suppose given the fact that Canadians get so much of their news from South of the border that that might reflect the fortunes of the party based on how the American Democratic Party is doing."

Globe columnist Lawrence Martin in a column headlined "A new moniker for the NDP would be like a fresh coat of paint" also supported the idea of name change for the New Democratic Party.

"The fresh coat of paint would help rid the NDP of a wearisome, antiquated image of women at sewing machines and socialist men in frayed tweed suits. The party has called itself new for no less than 48 years. Nothing is new that long," wrote Mr. Martin last week.



But Pollster Nik Nanos in an interview with *The Hill Times* said that changing the party name is a significant step and it might send mixed signals to Canadians and might confuse them as well.

"The New Democrats have just provincially won the government in Nova Scotia and now the federal New Democrats are thinking about changing their name. It sends a mixed signal on the provincial level when the national party looks at changing its name. There are definitely risks involved because voters will be wondering how is the party under a different name any different from the party before?" he said in an interview.

Mr. Nanos disagreed with the argument from the proponents of the name change that the party is about 50 years old and it's not new anymore.

"From a grammatical point of view, it [this argument] would be valid. For many Canadians, they actually don't think the party in terms of New Democrats, they think of the party in terms of the NDP. Part of the brand is not just the actual name of the party, it's the acronym."

Mr. Nanos also argued that historically, the NDP members have been of the view that the Canadians should have their own distinct identity separate from the United States.

"I'd probably be more concerned about the fact that within the New Democratic Party, there's a definite history of wanting Canada to chart its own path separate from the United States. In a way, this flies in the face of that, that any kind of political party would copy the name of a party in the United States. Think of it this way, if the Conservatives tomorrow decided that they wanted to call themselves the Republican Party, what do you think the New Democrats would say about that?"

Former NDP leader Alexa McDonough in an interview said that she was surprised that the name change issue is receiving so much attention in the media.

"If you ask me to list a thousand issues that are more important to Canadians, that are actually more important to the overwhelming majority of New Democrats, it wouldn't be on the list," said Ms. McDonough.

She added that she's been attending her party's conventions since the 1970s and there have always been resolutions proposing a name change but they never got passed.

"We've always got a few resolutions that come in to propose a name change, like always. I've never known a convention where that didn't happen."

NDP national director Brad Lavigne said that the party leader is not taking any position on this issue and is leaving it up to the party delegates to make the decision. He also declined to say if the party has convened any market research on this issue as some suggest that the name change could send mixed signals and may confuse Canadians.

"We don't discuss our market research strategy in the media so I can't offer you an answer as to what we polled or not polled on. Whether that's [name change would confuse Canadians] true or not would be a consideration for the delegates. ...NDP staff and the leader are not weighing in on the debate."

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