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The Hill Times, September 1st, 2008  
**NEWS STORY**  
 By Abbas Rana

## Libs say they've got cash, can match Tories dollar-for-dollar in next campaign

**'We'll spend just as much money as the Conservatives,' says top campaign adviser Gerard Kennedy**

Toronto—The federal Liberals say they're ready financially and organizationally for a federal election and that they will match the Conservative Party's campaign spending dollar-for-dollar in the next federal election.

"We'll spend just as much money as the Conservatives. It's either money we have now in our fund, or it's money we will get back as rebates, or it's money that we will borrow based on our ability to pay back," Gerrard Kennedy, Liberal Leader St  phane Dion's (Saint-Laurent-Cartierville, Que.) adviser on election readiness and party renewal, said in a recent interview with *The Hill Times* in Toronto.

The spending limit for the national political parties in the next federal election is likely to be about \$19-million per party.

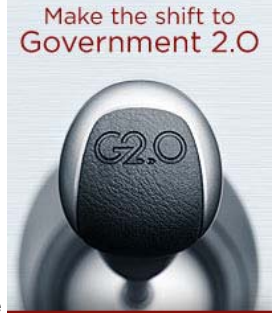
Mr. Kennedy, who is running as a Liberal candidate in the riding of Parkdale-High Park, Ont., spoke with *HT* at a Liberal Victory Fund fundraiser on Aug. 21 at a restaurant on Centre Island in Toronto. The Victory fund is a recent initiative of the Liberal Party focused on grassroots fundraising. To get a membership in the fund, Liberals are required to donate a minimum of \$10 a month, of which \$5 goes to their riding association and \$5 to the national party. In return, according to the Victory Fund website, members will be invited to participate in 120 hours annually of live online dialogues with senior Liberal MPs and other key party figures. Also, at the next party convention, the party office will set up a Victory Fund reception area, lounge, and preferred seating.

At the fundraiser in Toronto, Bonnie Crombie, party candidate in the Toronto riding of Mississauga-Streetsville and co-chair of the event, told *The Hill Times* that 300 Liberals attended the event and overall, more than 1,000 people had so far joined the Victory Fund from across the country.

Ever since the Liberals lost the federal election, they have been lagging far behind the Conservatives in party fundraising. According to Elections Canada fundraising numbers, last year, the Harper Conservatives collected \$17,012,049 from 159,122 donors, more than three times the Liberals' total. The Liberals fundraised \$4,906,215 from a total of 35,783 people at the same time. The Bloc raised a total of \$465,296 in 2007. The NDP raised a total of \$3,980,089 from 53,110 people last year and the Green Party raised a total of \$1,005,632 from 12,003 individuals.

With the possibility of a federal election looming, Doug Ferguson, president of the Liberal Party, sent out an email last week, urging his party members to make a special donation of "\$50, \$100 or \$250" to the party to "help ensure that the Conservative attack ads aren't the only thing Canadians see and hear when a snap election is called."

Mr. Ferguson, in the email, accused the Prime Minister of triggering an election because



Liberals have momentum.

"So why is Mr. Harper so desperate for an election now? The reason is simple: Liberal candidates are winning in all four of the byelections currently under way—the Conservatives didn't anticipate this shift, and they cannot afford the perception that they are losing traction. Harper's concern is only enhanced by the continuing Elections Canada investigation into the Conservatives alleged 'in & out' scheme, and the House of Commons investigation into Brian Mulroney's dealings with Karlheinz Schreiber," wrote Mr. Ferguson.

"But most importantly, something else has happened—you and your fellow Canadians have increasingly realized that Stéphane Dion leads the right team and has the right vision for the Canada you want."

Although the federal election had not yet been called as of deadline last week, Conservatives had already started running campaign advertisements. In a new ad, which was launched on Aug. 28, the Harper Tories did not attack any political party but featured people speaking on what they like about the Prime Minister.

Mr. Kennedy said that Liberals at this time have momentum on their side, but when asked why was this not reflected in public opinion polls, he said: "In fact, depending on how you read them, there seems to be some. The story for a long time now has been remarkable: how the Conservative Party, with all the advantages of power, can't make itself more popular. The momentum that I'm talking about is on the ground, it takes a little while to be picked up in the polls," said Mr. Kennedy, who added that Prime Ministers always get more attention from the general public up until the start of the election campaign, and after that, all the leaders are on equal footing in terms of attention from Canadians.

Meanwhile, with the possibility of a looming federal election, which is likely to be called by the end of this week, Liberal Deputy Leader Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Ont.), in an interview on Centre Island, echoed Mr. Kennedy's views.

"He's [Mr. Harper is] playing a game of dare ... He looks at his cards and he thinks it doesn't get better for him down the road, and so he's trying to push us into an election. We're ready to go. As this rally [Victory Fund fundraiser] indicates, we've got the candidates, we've got the organization. On about three days notice, we can fill this venue, so that's a sign we've got the capability," said Mr. Ignatieff.

Recent public opinion polls have shown that the Liberals and the Conservatives are in a statistical dead heat with the Conservatives nationally, but the Tories have made significant inroads in Quebec, which will likely play a critical role in the outcome of the next federal election.

According to a recent CROP poll of 1,003 Quebecers which was released last week, the federal Conservatives had the support of 31 per cent of Quebecers followed by the Bloc with 30 per cent. The Dion Liberals had support from 20 per cent and the NDP 14 per cent. The poll was conducted between Aug. 14 and 24 and had a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

And according to a Nanos Research poll released last Friday, Liberals were effectively tied nationally with the Conservatives, at 35 per cent and 33 per cent support respectively. The New Democratic Party had the support of 17 per cent of Canadians and the Green Party had seven per cent.

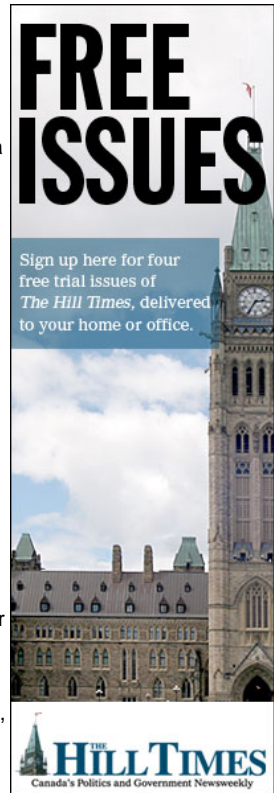
In Quebec, according to the poll, the Bloc was leading with 31 per cent support, followed by the Conservatives with 25 per cent, Liberals with 24 per cent, the NDP with 13 per cent and the Green Party with seven per cent.

In Ontario, Nanos poll showed that the Dion Liberals were well ahead of other parties with 42 per cent support, followed by the Conservatives with 29 per cent, the NDP with 21 per cent and the Green Party with eight per cent.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Nik Nanos, president of Nanos Research, said that one of the most important findings of the poll was that NDP made some gains in the last few months both in Ontario and Quebec.

"What it shows is that the Liberals are still way ahead of the Conservatives in the province of Ontario, the Conservatives are down a little bit, which is not good news considering there are a number of Conservative ridings that they currently hold that were won by very close margins," said Mr. Nanos.

"We had basically about a four point shift from the Conservatives, a lot of that went to the NDP. Actually, the NDP also picked up some support in the province of Quebec at the expense of the Bloc, primarily on the island of Montreal. We still have the Bloc marginally ahead, but we have more of a three-way race," he said. Mr. Nanos added that the NDP could becoming a stronger protest vote in the province for people who are unhappy with



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the Bloc, the Tories or the Liberals.

"We do see a noticeable drop for the Bloc, but factoring in the margin of error for the sample, the Bloc are marginally ahead. And the Conservatives and Liberals are very close still."

That closeness between support for the Liberals and the Conservatives nationally continues to be a story in the opinion polls. "A potential election poses risks for both the Conservatives and the Liberals. Prime Minister Harper seems ready to risk his mandate while his party is tied with the Liberals," Mr. Nanos said, adding that the risk for Mr. Dion he "has not been embraced by Canadians."

Tom Flanagan, a top former adviser to Prime Minister Harper said in an article for *The Globe and Mail* that even if the Harper Conservatives don't win a majority government in the next election, the election will still be useful for them strategically.

"Do you remember your ancient history? From a Conservative point of view, this is a rerun of the Punic Wars, with the Conservatives starring as the rising Roman republic and the Liberals cast as the evil empire of Carthage. In the first Punic War, the Romans took Sicily from Carthage; in the second, they took the rest of the Carthaginian possessions in Europe; and in the third, they defeated Carthage totally, razed the city to the ground and sowed salt in the fields so nothing would ever grow there again.

"In the first Canadian Punic War, the Conservatives brought the Liberals down to a minority government; in the second, they pushed the Liberals out of government altogether, although they not did get their own majority. What will happen in the impending third Canadian Punic War? Destruction of the Liberals is not at hand; there will be further sequels to this movie. But if the Liberals are not careful, they, like the federal Progressive Conservatives of sainted memory, could be pushed into a financial pit they can never climb out of."

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*The Hill Times*