

## Liberal Ignatieff says Canada ready for change

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By [Allan Dowd](#)

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, May 2 (Reuters) - Newly minted Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff said on Saturday that Canadians wanted change but he did not signal when he might try to force the minority Conservative government into an election.

Ignatieff, who had led Canada's main opposition party on an interim basis since late last year, was elected as permanent leader at a convention in Vancouver that organizers said showed it had rebounded from last year's stinging election defeat.

The vote came the same day an opinion poll showed the Liberals holding a narrow lead over the ruling Conservatives, although Ignatieff trailed Prime Minister Stephen Harper as to who voters thought was best to lead the country.

The former Harvard academic who returned to Canada in 2005 after nearly three decades abroad accused Harper of practicing the politics of division in a bid to remain in power.

"You can feel a longing for change sweeping across the land," Ignatieff said in his acceptance speech, which was preceded by a video that showed several images of him talking with U.S. President Barack Obama.

"If we offer our citizens a message of hope, I believe Canadians will ask us to form their next government," he told the sign-waving delegates.

But Ignatieff's speech did not call on them to prepare for a campaign. He said previously he did not think Canadians wanted an election so soon after the 2008 vote.

Ignatieff faced no opposition in the leadership vote, a sharp contrast to the party's 2006 leadership race where he was seen as the front-runner before the convention but ended up losing to Stephane Dion.

The Liberals suffered electoral defeat under Dion in October. After a parliamentary crisis in November, Ignatieff was given the party's interim leadership.

After taking the reins, Ignatieff ended a proposed partnership with two smaller parties. That allowed the Conservative government, which holds a minority of seats in Parliament, to survive a parliamentary crisis while Ignatieff worked to rebuild support for the Liberals.

A Nanos Research poll released on Saturday showed the Liberals maintaining the 36 percent to 33 percent lead they took over the Conservatives in March. But some 32 percent thought Harper would make the best prime minister, compared with 27 percent for Ignatieff.  
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The poll suggested that Ignatieff's ranking might have suffered because of his recent statement that taxes might have to increase to pay for the massive deficits being rung up by Ottawa to pull the economy out of recession.

The Conservatives greeted Ignatieff's win by attacking another measure approved by the delegates involving support for a carbon tax, which became a major political liability for Dion in the last election. (Reporting Allan Dowd; Editing by Peter Cooney)

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