


[Editorials](#) | [Columnists](#) | [Letters & Feedback](#) | [MacKinnon Cartoon](#) | [Blogs](#)
 Print  E-Mail  Text Size **S** **M** **L**  Digg This!  Newsvine  Share on Facebook

Listeria could be re-election hazard

By The Canadian Press

Fri, Aug 29 - 9:51 AM

OTTAWA — Regardless of who's to blame for the tainted meat tragedy, the prospect of a mounting death toll in the midst of an election campaign is bound to hurt Stephen Harper's Conservatives, a pollster predicts.

Indeed, Nik Nanos said the prime minister might want to reconsider his apparent plan to pull the plug on his government next week.

"I think the Conservatives are facing enough risks in this campaign because basically (Harper's) putting his government on the line with no guarantee of success," Nanos said in an interview.

With the death toll from listeria linked to contaminated meat products likely to continue mounting, Nanos said the public health crisis has injected into the campaign "a wild card that's not likely to play in his favour."

Nanos said the listeriosis outbreak could have the same impact on Harper's Conservatives during the coming campaign as the income trust fiasco had on the Liberals during the 2006 election.

In the middle of the last campaign, news broke that the RCMP had launched an investigation into a possible leak of a Liberal government policy change on income trusts. The news threw the Liberals on the defensive and effectively derailed their campaign — even though all Liberals involved were eventually cleared of any wrongdoing.

In the tainted-meat affair, the Harper government is vigorously denying opposition allegations that it has cut back on funding for food inspection and turned over some responsibility for food testing to industry. And it's bluntly dismissing union criticism that inspectors are now spending more time shuffling paper work prepared by food processing companies than actually overseeing the plants.

"We are saying that's not true," Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz told a news conference Wednesday.

"There is no valid argument that there's been any cuts whatsoever to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency."


Ritz said the government pumped an extra \$113 million into food and product safety in its last budget and has hired some 200 more food inspectors, with another 58 to come by year end.

None of which may matter in the heat of an election campaign.

Just as the income trust investigation reinforced a pre-existing perception in 2006 that the Liberals were corrupt, Nanos said the listeriosis tragedy could reinforce a perception that the Tories' belief in a more hands-off government is putting the lives of Canadians at risk. "So it could leave the Conservatives vulnerable if a narrative emerges that this is an example (of what happens) when you don't have actual government inspectors and you can't rely on an industry to police itself."

Nanos said the listeriosis outbreak could be particularly damaging for the Tories in Ontario, where voters still remember the tainted water tragedy in Walkerton eight years ago.

A judicial inquiry concluded that provincial government cutbacks and a policy of privatizing water testing contributed to the Walkerton debacle, in which seven people died and more than 2,300 fell ill.

Search: Today 7 Days Web SUBSCRIPTIONS:  Newspaper |  RSS - Canada stories

MULTIMEDIA CENTRE

TOP VIDEO



PLAY VIDEO ▶
Zoom airlines failure grounds passengers

TOP VIDEO



PLAY VIDEO ▶
Poll: Canadians would like a change in government

TOP SLIDESHOW



PLAY SLIDE ▶
Pictures of the Week Aug. 16-22

ANNOUNCEMENTS: [Obits](#) | [Births](#) | [Cards](#) | [InMemoriams](#) | [Milestones](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

*If it moves...
we'll move it faster*

**ADVERTISE YOUR VEHICLE
ABSOLUTELY**

TODAY'S CANADA STORIES

Some Grits seek green shift shift
 Canadians ready for fall election, pollster finds
 New 'Diefenbreaker' to ply Canada's North
 Records describe 2 escaped prisoners as violent gangsters
CANADA IN BRIEF
 U.S. man arrested; child porn alleged
 Lawsuit sought over deadly C. difficile outbreak
 Combat victim laid to rest
 Man beat lawyer, jailed nine years
 Propane blast sparks probe of regulations
 Quebec journalist Michel Vastel dies at 68

[Back to Canada Section](#)