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## News

### Debates leave Dion upbeat, up in polls

By **KATHLEEN HARRIS**, National Bureau Chief

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MONTREAL — He's still down, but not out.

Stephane Dion came out swinging on the heels of back-to-back leaders debates with a stride in his step and a surprising bounce in the polls.

Jockeying for public support in the broad middle against the "polarized" extremes of the NDP on the left and Conservatives on the right, Dion also tried to wrestle the upper hand from Stephen Harper on the number one issue of the campaign: The economy.

As the remaining campaign days dwindle, he began the final sprint to the finish with a continued outreach to progressive voters, and a fresh appeal to disaffected Conservatives.

"This party, this government, will take care of the difficult situation in which we are in. With Stephen Harper it's passivity, with Stephen Harper doing nothing is an option. Doing nothing is not an option," he said.

A Nanos Research nightly tracking poll shows the gap between the Conservatives and Liberals has narrowed to just five points, with the Tories sitting at 35% and the Grits climbing to 30% of support from decided voters. Victory is still out of reach, yet Dion refused to concede that his primary goal now is to block a Harper majority.

Speaking to a business crowd in downtown Montreal, Dion turned the tables on Harper's campaign stump phrase, suggesting it is the Prime Minister who poses a "risk" to Canada's economy by failing to take concrete action. From the first day of the campaign, Harper has tried to drive the Oct. 14 ballot question as a choice between his "steady hand" and Dion's "risky experiment" of a carbon tax during troubled economic times.

"Mr. Harper has said that this election is a choice between risk and certainty," Dion said. "Well there is one thing that is certain — Stephen Harper is an economic risk that Canadians can no longer afford."

Dion spoke again of his five-point plan to tackle the economic crisis within 30 days of taking office; a plan that would stimulate job creation and strengthen the regulatory regime to protect Canadians' savings, mortgages and investments.

Dion also took a swipe at NDP Leader Jack Layton, mocking his key platform promise to repeal corporate income tax cuts worth \$50 billion.

"I guess Jack Layton thinks the markets, Canadian businesses and their employees haven't taken enough of a beating in the past few days," he said. "Jack Layton's plan is a job killer."

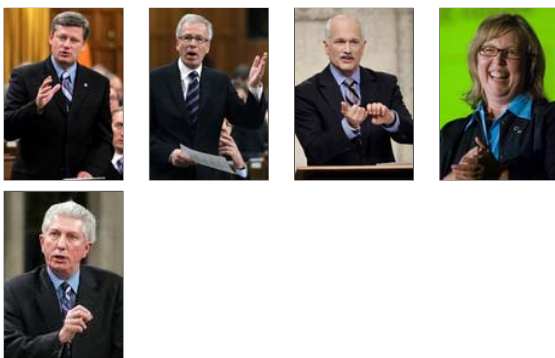
Denis Coderre, one of 15 Liberal candidates flanking Dion at the Montreal event, summed up the key message Liberals will drive home to voters in the final stretch of the campaign: "We have a choice between the 'laissez-faire, I don't care' of Stephen Harper and the socialist approach where we have to tax everything from Jack Layton," he told Sun Media. "In times of economic turmoil, we need the radical centre."

Federal party leaders are fanning out across the country, working to shore up support in the final days of the election campaign.

Campaigning in Saint John, N.B., Conservative Leader Stephen Harper announced plans to tackle Canada's skilled trades shortage with a new \$2,000 bonus for apprentices who complete their training.

Layton made a swing through Quebec ridings he hopes to take from the Liberals and Bloc Quebecois, while Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe made a rare detour from Quebec to tell the Economic Club of Toronto that Harper must be "shunned" and stopped from winning a majority.

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