

Damage from SNC-Lavalin affair may drastically hurt Liberals re-election bid

EDITORIAL

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is knee deep in trouble as a political firestorm erupted on Parliament Hill.

An automated telephone survey by Forum Research found that 42 per cent of decided and leaning voters would support the Conservative Party in a federal election, according to the Star. The Liberals followed with 33 per cent of respondents indicating they would support the party, while 12 per cent said they intend or would likely vote for the New Democratic Party.

This followed a testimony by Jody Wilson-Raybould where she laid out a detailed and damning account of how she and her staff were subjected to what she called a 'consistent and sustained' effort by many people within the reigning government to politically interfere in her roles as the Attorney General of Canada to secure a deferred prosecution agreement with SNC-Lavalin, according to the Toronto Star.

Montreal based-SNC-Lavalin and two of its subsidiaries had mounting charges against them by the RCMP for bribing officials in Libya for almost \$50 million and defrauding Libyan organizations for about \$120 million.

As their troubles worsened, they lobbied out to the Federal Liberals for a plea deal called a 'deferred prosecution agreement' after their dealings in Libya.

They started doing this just four months after Trudeau's government won power from the former Conservatives regime.

Like plea deals involving individuals, these agreements suspend criminal prosecutions if the corporation agrees to pay fines and cooperate with authorities.

A criminal conviction on the charges would have barred it from Canadian government contracts for a decade.

The Liberals tabled a 582-page omnibus bill that includes the introduction of remediation agreements. The Bill becomes law during the summer after brief discussion at the House of Commons finance committee.

The federal public prosecutor's office decides not to offer SNC-Lavalin a remediation agreement. SNC-Lavalin said it 'strongly disagrees' with the decision and votes to keep pushing for a remediation. The company asked a Federal Court judge to force prosecutors to reconsider.

This follows meetings with Quebec Premier Francois Legault with, Gerald Butts, Trudeau's former principal secretary with Wilson-Raybould and a resignation from Treasury Board President Scott Brison, a shuffle within cabinet to move Wilson-Raybould out of justice into the position of veteran affairs 'which some consider a demotion' and on top of this, an even damaging report by the Globe and Mail citing unnamed sources who alleged officials in Trudeau's office pressured the former Attorney General to overrule federal prosecutors by offering a remediation agreement to SNC-Lavalin.

Trudeau denied allegations, Wilson-Raybould wouldn't confirm anything all while she resigns from cabinet and Liberal MPs try to block her from providing a testimony.

In defence of the Montreal engineering juggernaut, and rather himself, the Prime Minister said his job was to stand up for jobs right across the country thereby meriting his actions.

Wilson Raybould said the events included 11 people, excluding herself and her political staff, from the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council Office and the Office of the Minister of Finance.

The whole saga seems like one disaster after another. One where a deal was supposed to be occur under the table with no repercussions. There's absolutely no reason not to take Wilson-Raybould's allegations against the Trudeau government seriously, as they are made by one of his most senior members. Until then she had restrictions placed on her limiting her from speaking publicly.

Wilson-Raybould believe, and correctly, that an attorney general must not be subject to political pressure from her own government to intervene in matters before the courts. It was clear, by the timeline of ensuing events, that efforts were made to persuade her to one side.

What has been alleged is catastrophic. Canadians cannot look away nor can the government. What the Prime Minister does next is yet to be determined. Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer has called for Trudeau's resignation while NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said it underscore his own party's demands for an independent public inquiry.

Canadians cannot look away. Wilson-Raybould stood her ground when she felt she was being pressed as attorney general.

The Conservatives and NDP have more than enough fuel here to dispense to the public during advertisement campaigns in the months leading up to the October election, and while the Liberals and Trudeau claim they did nothing wrong, maybe the damage inflicted is too much to recover from. Or, it could not. Canadians may forgive him and not care at the slightest of this debacle and continue on to support the Liberals.

We will see in the fall whether or not Canadians can stand by Trudeau and watch him lead the country for four more years.