

Tories, NDP take aim at Martin

Contender 'is trying to pull wool over people's eyes and separate himself from his record,' Clark says: Plan Commons attack

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OTTAWA - The Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats intend to join the Canadian Alliance in using next week's reopening of Parliament as a platform for a concerted attack on Paul Martin's record in government.

Joe Clark, the Tory leader, said Mr. Martin, who many expect to be the next prime minister, takes credit for eradicating Canada's \$40-billion deficit, but fails to mention the billions he cut, as finance minister, from health care transfers to the provinces to accomplish this.

Mr. Clark said the Tories will attempt to get to the bottom of a deal that saw the federal government spend \$101-million to buy corporate jets for the Prime Minister and other ministers when there had been no public discussions.

The purchase announcement came on March 31, the last day of the government's fiscal year and prior to the two-week parliamentary Easter break.

"I want to take him to task for hypocrisy," said Mr. Clark.

"Martin has been part of this government in every single decision they took, including the \$101-million expenditure on the Challengers they didn't need from the beginning.

"Martin is trying to pull the wool over people's eyes and separate himself from his record. So it's legitimate to go after him."

He said Mr. Martin talks a good line about the importance of education and alleviating student debt, but when he had a chance to vote in favour of a Tory motion that would have allowed tax credits against student debt, he not only voted against it, but encouraged his colleagues to do the same.

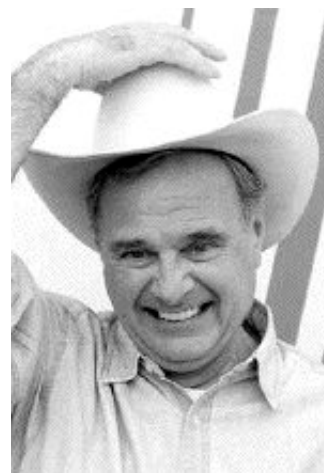
"This is a clear contradiction with, first, his pretended interest in students and second, his pretended interest in letting individual MPs vote their conscience."

Stephen Harper, the Canadian Alliance leader, has already made it clear he sees Mr. Martin as a potential threat to grassroots Alliance support. In Halifax last week, Mr. Harper took to mocking Mr. Martin, describing him as the "messiah-in-waiting" and criticizing him for running a phantom leadership campaign devoid of detail.

Lorne Nystrom and Joe Comartin, both NDP MPs vying to replace their leader, Alexa McDonough, say they also intend to focus on Mr. Martin. The NDP candidates are convinced Mr. Martin will win the Liberal leadership contest, expected in November, 2003, and take the party into the next election.



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front-runner, to task
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They say he has not been properly challenged during his cross-country leadership campaign this summer as he has not been forced to detail his policies.

Both the Conservatives and the NDP concede it will be difficult to go after Mr. Martin because, as a backbencher, he no longer has to take questions during Question Period in the House of Commons. But they say they will use every opportunity to point out the duplicity in what he claims to stand for.

"He has a lot of things to answer for and, in fact, some of the things he's doing right around the country ... it's hypocritical because he hasn't implemented those in the period of time when he was the finance minister," said Mr. Comartin, who is an MP in the same Windsor riding that Mr. Martin's father represented several decades ago.

Mr. Comartin pointed out that while Mr. Martin was the finance minister, Mr. Martin approved a 22% reduction in the Environment budget -- twice the average reduction other departments underwent during the program to cut costs and eradicate the deficit.

Yet after the deficit was eliminated, Mr. Martin increased the Environment budget only marginally.

"Now he's running around the country greening himself up. He's speaking about spending money on municipalities ... and the importance of the atmospheric fund," Mr. Comartin said, adding that the quality of air deteriorated under Mr. Martin's reign in Finance.

Mr. Nystrom said Mr. Martin's candidacy opens up huge potential on the left because his policies are more right-wing and fiscally conservative than other Liberals. "He led the most massive cutback in the history of social programs in this country in the budget in 1995."

Mr. Nystrom, a Saskatchewan MP, accused Mr. Martin of focusing his attacks on the unemployed and the poor. "The gap between the rich and the poor in this country after narrowing for years has been widening in the 1990s -- and again, who was the minister of finance? Paul Martin. It's a huge, big target for anybody on the left."

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(Lorne) Nystrom:
(Photo ran in all editions except Toronto.)



(Joe) Comartin: **(Photo ran in all editions except Toronto.)**

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