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## Key Tories call on Clark to step aside

By KIM LUNMAN  
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OTTAWA -- Two weeks in advance of a leadership review to assess Joe Clark's performance, some key Progressive Conservatives, including a Tory MP, are calling on him to step aside before the next election to rejuvenate the party.

"The fact is, the Canadian public doesn't look at us as the government in waiting," New Brunswick MP Greg Thompson said. "I'm hoping that Joe will step down. We can't generate any excitement or recruit any candidates. We're not moving ahead. We're dropping in the polls." However, he said: "I'm not involved in any kind of movement to dump Joe."

Mr. Clark, 63, faces an automatic leadership review by 1,300 delegates at the party's annual general meeting in Edmonton.

Mr. Clark, who was not available for comment yesterday, has said he still intends to seek the party's endorsement for his leadership at the convention and he plans to lead the Tories into the next election.

The issue of leadership is expected to be discussed as Mr. Clark meets his caucus face-to-face at a meeting tomorrow.

Mr. Thompson is the only member of that caucus to publicly call on Mr. Clark to step down now and call a leadership convention. Including Mr. Clark, there are 13 Tories in the House of Commons.

Peter Van Loan, past president of the Ontario and national PC parties, said he thinks Mr. Clark has enough support from members to hang on as leader. "My view is the problems that we face are structural. A single change in party leader is not enough to solve them."

Manitoba MP Rick Borotsik said there is no need for a new party leader and praised the former prime minister for a job well done. "I've always supported Joe Clark. He's given us an era of stability," he said. "He is without question the best leader of the House of Commons and is a demonstrated statesman."

But some Tories privately concede Mr. Clark may have trouble garnering the support he needs in the vote to continue as leader.

Mr. Thompson said Mr. Clark inherited a party that was at 20 per cent in the polls and watched as it plummeted to 8 per cent after the 2000 election.

Last month, a group of influential Tories started circulating a letter asking that Mr. Clark step down to avoid an embarrassment.

Heward Grafftey, a former cabinet minister in the short-lived Conservative government of Mr. Clark, has said he will run to lead the Tories if Mr. Clark loses the leadership review. Mr. Grafftey, 74, is the only Tory to so far declare

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leadership intentions.

Harvie Andre, an adviser to Mr. Clark who co-chaired his 1998 leadership campaign, has said he expected Mr. Clark to retire prior to the August convention.

"There's a great deal of affection for Joe," Mr. Andre said.

"There's no organized movement to get rid of him. Most of us believe Joe will do the right thing at the right time."



Newfoundland Tory MP Loyola Hearn said the leadership issue must be addressed. "Undoubtedly, you have to look at leadership because it's the leader that is ultimately accepted or rejected by the public," he said.



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