

## Martin stokes PM race with a steamship full of Liberal supporters

**Jim McNulty**

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Paul Martin's people made it official yesterday when they plunked down a \$37,500 deposit for the man's Liberal leadership bid.

If anyone had doubts about Martin's place in this race, they were surely dispelled with release of his support levels among party riding presidents.

You're reading this correctly: 86 per cent of Liberal riding presidents across Canada, or 259 of 301, signed his nomination papers. Eighty-six per cent!

Not to mention all provincial presidents from the Young Liberals of Canada and the National Women's Commission. All hail Paul Martin!

The man himself was all humility as he spoke during a stop in Burlington, barely a stone's throw from the Tim Horton's in East Hamilton where his only declared opponent -- Sheila Copps -- recently launched her bid.

"When I look at the number of riding presidents . . . I'm very grateful for the support and somewhat humbled by it," Martin understated.

I suspect Sheila is somewhat humbled by the numbers as well. Humbled as in "I think I need another tequila."

And what of poor John Manley, the only other potential candidate now that Anne McLellan, Martin Cauchon and Herb Dhaliwal are out.

"I still intend to run," Manley said yesterday amid ongoing speculation that his heart isn't in it. Manley knows Martin's people are well in command of just about every level of the party, including all-important membership sales.

His ambivalence is telling; if Manley does run, one suspects it will be as a good Liberal footsoldier doing the party a much bigger favour than himself.

There is one thin ray of hope for challengers, and that is the political trouble now creeping up to Martin through his ownership of Canada Steamship Lines.

This was never a big problem for Martin when he served as finance minister. Everyone knew he owned CSL, and everyone knew he placed his affairs into a so-called "blind trust" that supposedly eliminated any conflict with his role in government.

But in recent weeks it has come to light that Martin's blind trust was, in the words of Tory leader Joe Clark, more like a seeing-eye dog. Numerous meetings were held between Martin and CSL executives in which he was informed of company moves -- all conveniently presided over by Howard Wilson, the ethics counsellor who reports to the prime minister.

How many times these CSL updates took place is unknown. Martin's people, Wilson and the government all invoke privacy and commercial competition reasons when refusing the information. Nor will anyone say how often Martin excused himself from cabinet talks involving government issues that could affect CSL.

Martin has asked Wilson to create a new trust deal that will allow him as prime minister to keep CSL and have someone else handle conflicted files. Critics say he should sell because the PM is

responsible for all government matters; sitting out is not an option.

In the U.S, senior politicians must divest holdings to avoid conflict. Canada needs a similar rule.

Martin should choose his dream: Continue owning CSL, or be prime minister. But not both.

E-mail: [jmcnulty@png.canwest.com](mailto:jmcnulty@png.canwest.com)

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