



**Drastic changes in municipal election**

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Montreal's municipal election has changed drastically with just two weeks to go before voters cast their ballots.

Vision Montreal's second-in-command Benoit Labonte, former leader of the opposition at city hall, has stepped down from his current position in office, and will no longer be a candidate in the Nov. 1 election.

Mayoral candidate Louise Harel asked Labonte to leave the party following allegations he had accepted more than \$200,000 from nine construction companies.

The money, from industry leaders including Tony Accurso, who won the now-cancelled water-meter contract, was ostensibly used for Labonte's Vision Montreal leadership bid.

While there is nothing unlawful about accepting campaign donations, critics say the optics of politicians accepting cash in brown envelopes are horrible.

Those horrid optics are increased when the politician in question held a broom with his boss earlier this year as they pledged to sweep city hall clean of corruption.

**New Poll**

Meanwhile a new poll, taken on the 14th and 15th of October, showed Louise Harel and mayor Gerald Tremblay were neck and neck among voter support.

The Angus Reid-La Presse poll indicates 37% of Montrealers plan to vote for Harel, while 36% prefer the incumbent.

23% of voters say they plan to vote for Projet Montreal's Richard Bergeron.

But the revelations about Labonte could drastically change voter attitudes, especially since there is a televised debate among the leaders Monday night.

**Lost faith in Labonte**

On Saturday, Harel called the allegations an "attempted political assassination", but on Sunday, she said she no longer has faith in Labonte.

"This morning I spoke to Benoit Labonte, and I asked him to immediately go to TVA studios in order to dissipate any doubt in people's minds," said Harel, referring to a report that aired on the French-language television network that called the financing of Labonte's leadership race into question.

Harel said she asked Labonte to leave the party after he refused to do the television interview.

Pierre Lampron, Vision Montreal candidate in the Vieux-Rosemont district, has taken over as Harel's right-hand man.

He says Harel's decision was lightning-quick.

"When she has known the facts about Mr. Labonte she has decided on the block. Really I just don't understand this comparison between the two leaders."

Harel said she believed her decision would send the right message to voters.

"Montrealers will see someone able to act very quickly and do what I have to do," said Harel.

Harel said she made it clear when she decided to run that there would be no anonymous donations.

She also said she wants the Director General of Elections to review the laws pertaining to municipal elections to guarantee transparency.

**Damaging allegations**

On Saturday, Labonte stepped down as leader of the opposition and resigned from his role as Harel's lieutenant following separate allegations in media reports.

Citing unnamed sources, a report that appeared on ruefrontenac.com suggested that Labonte accepted \$100,000 from Tony Accurso, head of a construction firm that belonged to a consortium that was granted the controversial \$355-million water meter contract.

French-language television network TVA reported that Labonte communicated with Accurso on several occasions and also accepted \$25,000 from another firm linked to the water meter contract.

The contract -- the largest ever awarded in the city's history -- was suspended by the Tremblay administration in April and cancelled altogether in September after a report from the auditor general concluded there were irregularities with the tendering process.

Labonte denied all of the allegations, but said he decided to step down because he did not want the controversy surrounding him to overshadow Harel or any other Vision Montreal candidates.

