

NATIONAL POST

Wednesday, July 29, 2009

Concern about Nortel slim: poll

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Presented by



Most Canadians don't think Nortel's bankruptcy proceedings are an issue of national importance, but only because they don't know much about the issue, a poll suggests.

The poll, released yesterday, assesses how Canadians feel about the government potentially intervening on behalf of Research In Motion to help the Canadian BlackBerry maker buy some Nortel assets.

"I think we like the idea of national champions. If you think that Nortel's just another company, you're not a big fan of the government intervening. If you think that Nortel is a national asset, then it changes the game," said Greg Lyle, managing director of Innovative Research, the firm that conducted the poll. "Nortel is a bit of a sleeper issue. People aren't paying much attention. But when we just give them one sentence about the technology, the results change pretty dramatically." The poll showed that without background information, just 27% of respondents considered Nortel a national asset.

But after a quick primer, that number jumped to 44%. And 44% of those polled also supported government intervention after receiving information on Nortel's wireless technology. Results suggest that how the government tackles this issue will not have a long-term effect on those who already vote Conservative.

But whether the issue becomes a question of Canadian values rather than technology and technicalities could affect voters, Mr. Lyle said. "It's basically an issue the government needs to tread very, very carefully on," he said. "As a standalone issue, this has got legs, but [the Tories] are limited in how far they can take the issue. The opposition would need to take this further, to make it look like Stephen Harper doesn't like the country."

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