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NEWS

Jagmeet Singh positions himself as 'growth candidate,' makes gains in vote-rich B.C., as rivals attack

The Singh campaign opened a B.C. office last week and has a 'targeted campaign' in Quebec.



Jagmeet Singh greets a supporter at his NDP leadership campaign launch on May 15 in Brampton, Ont. Mr. Singh now has the most federal caucus endorsements, with three. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



By SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

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While Jagmeet Singh's opponents portray him as a flash in the pan and commentators are pointing to his potential weakness in Quebec, the NDP leadership candidate is picking up endorsements in vote-rich British Columbia and his team is positioning him as a strong fundraiser and the party's "growth candidate"—someone who brings new socially progressive Canadians into the fold and re-energizes the party after a disastrous election.

While much has been written about the former Ontario deputy NDP leader's snazzy custom-designed suits, GQ magazine feature, and mixed martial arts mastery, federal politicians may still be getting to know the provincial politician and why some are considering him a frontrunner in the four-person race.

Mr. Singh has attracted a campaign team led by an adviser to the son of the revered late party leader Jack Layton. His fundraising "far exceeded" the combined total of the other NDP leadership candidates in their respective early days, his campaign says. And Mr. Singh now has the most federal caucus endorsements.

While a [poll](#) earlier this month had him tied for third place, bested by federal MPs Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay, Ont.) and Niki Ashton (Churchill-Keewatinook Aski, Man.), Mr. Singh has been targeted in debates by his opponents, in what [The Canadian Press](#) reported last month could be a sign they see him as the candidate to beat.

"We need to shake things up in Ottawa and I do think the time is right to put a different face on our party," said NDP MP Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, B.C.), who has endorsed Mr. Singh and said the Ontario MPP has "a lot of the same vibes" as the late federal NDP leader Jack Layton.

Mr. Stewart sees an advantage in a leader who isn't tied to the House and can be on the campaign trail building support ahead of the expected 2019 federal election to make up for some of the 59 seats the NDP lost in the 2015 election and [2016's low fundraising numbers](#).

"We have to recognize that we weren't doing something right and we need a big change in approach to our campaigning and our approach to connecting with Canadians," said Mr. Stewart.

The Singh campaign has said it has "far exceeded" the \$252,664 in combined donations collected in the first quarter of 2017 by the four candidates then in the race. Mr. Singh didn't join the race until May 15, well into the second quarter. Elections Canada won't release second-quarter fundraising results until the end of this month.

Mr. Angus, another perceived frontrunner, has attacked Mr. Singh for acting like a [Liberal](#).



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In response to Mr. Singh's portrayal of himself as the "growth candidate" in the race at a Saskatoon debate July 11, Mr. Angus pushed back.

"We've won by putting the organizers on the ground, not by having someone come in and say I can do this all by myself," Angus said. "That's been the problem with that central theme, that little group in Ottawa that says, 'You know what, we are going to get a big image, we are going to get a big spin and we are all going to win.' That's what Liberals do; that's not what New Democrats do."



Guy Caron, Charlie Angus, Niki Ashton and Peter Julian were the first four candidates to enter the race. Jagmeet Singh raised more in his first six weeks than all candidates combined in the first quarter of 2017, Mr. Singh's campaign has said. Mr. Julian has since dropped out of the race. The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia

Mr. Singh now has the most federal caucus endorsements, with three. It jumps to 19 when provincial and former politicians are included, compared to 11 for Mr. Angus, five for Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette-Témiscouata-Les Basques, Que.), and four for Ms. Ashton. [Less than a week after Peter Julian \(New Westminster-Burnaby, B.C.\) left the race](#) earlier this month, nine B.C. MLAs confirmed they sided with Mr. Singh, including several now in cabinet, including Education Minister Rob Fleming, Health Minister Judy Darcy, and Labour Minister Harry Bains.



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they sided with Mr. Singh, including several now in cabinet, including Education Minister Rob Fleming, Health Minister Judy Darcy, and Labour Minister Harry Bains.

Last week, the team opened an office in Surrey, B.C., as an organizing base in a province where campaign director Michal Hay said the Singh team is seeing an "overwhelming amount of support."

'It starts with the campaign director'

Analysts point to fundraising capacity as a key marker for a frontrunner and point to a savvy team led by Ms. Hay, who is on a leave of absence as executive assistant to Toronto councillor Michael Layton and also ran Olivia Chow's 2014 mayoral bid. Mr. Layton, son of Jack Layton, did not respond when asked by email last week if he was supporting Mr. Singh. Ms. Chow is Jack Layton's widow.

Earnscliffe principal Kathleen Monk, a former communications director to Jack Layton who has not endorsed anyone in the campaign, said the MPP has a strong team, among them an "incredibly organized" Ms. Hay who plays the long game. Mr. Stewart said he's confident in the team and "it starts with the campaign director."

"I can't think of a stronger choice," said Ms. Monk, who like other analysts said she was impressed by the Singh campaign's national "ground game" that underpins everything.

Ms. Hay said that includes door-knocking and using a texting app to fundraise called Hustle, which allows for mass group messages and can also send individualized messages.

"That's been effective," said Ms. Hay, adding they also use Slack so that volunteers can organize themselves and build their own channels.

While some of Mr. Singh's field directors may not be big names on the national scene, they have been involved at the local riding levels for years, she said. The team also includes former speechwriter to Jack Layton Willy Blomme and the Broadbent Institute's policy director Jonathan Sas.

While Mr. Angus, who fundraised the most in the first quarter, and Mr. Singh have emerged as frontrunners, Ms. Monk said the other two can't be discounted. Mr. Caron is a "dark horse" and she said Ms. Ashton hasn't been given enough credit for her campaign, with a strong digital approach and support from grassroots members.

As she sees it, there are still three key turning points: the upcoming fundraising numbers, the Aug. 17 cut-off for campaigns to sign up new members to vote in the election, and the debates that close the race—particularly the last French debate in Montreal on Aug.



Leadership hopeful Charlie Angus raised the most in the first quarter with \$10,765 from 854 contributions. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Mr. Singh's vulnerabilities are in rural Canada, Ms. Monk said, noting he stumbled on Old Age Security means-testing in the Saskatoon debate.

"You can win it on the mechanics of money and organization. He has to still prove he has the policy chops and can deliver at these debates," said Ms. Monk.

But if all four perform well on that front, it'll be his perceived potential to bring in the new members needed to win an election that will push the party pendulum his way.

Added former NDP staffer Robin MacLachlan, "I'm not sure there's any other candidate that can demonstrate new and innovative organizing tactics and commitment and devotion to restructuring the party machinery that prepares us to go toe to toe with Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and Liberals in 2019."

B.C. emerging as key battleground

The Singh campaign says it has been signing up "thousands upon thousands" of members and that the first push to raise money was with the former Ontario NDP deputy leader's base in the Greater Toronto Area, including Brampton and Hamilton. He has represented Bramalea-Gore-Malton, a riding in Brampton, in the Ontario legislature since 2011.



B.C. MP Kennedy Stewart is endorsing Jagmeet Singh and making daily calls to sign on supporters. The Hill Times photograph by Jake Wright

But it's B.C. that can make the difference, said Mr. Stewart who is joined by provincial colleague Randall Garrison (Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke, B.C.) in supporting Mr. Singh, as well as Quebec MP Hélène Lavergère (Laurier-Sainte Marie, Que.).

"We have the capacity to ramp up membership quite substantially, which would be tougher in Quebec which hasn't had a longer history of people being members of the party," said Mr. Stewart, who waited for Mr. Singh's public opposition to the Kinder Morgan oil pipeline running from Alberta through to coastal B.C. before he got on board. "B.C. is actually the key, I think, to this."

Now he's an active campaigner, working "every day," making calls to shore up support and explains concerns from some about core issue for his constituents, like why it took Mr. Singh longer than others to come out against pipelines.

But B.C. historically has made up about a third of NDP membership, Mr. Stewart said, and with a one-member one-vote design it doesn't matter where candidates concentrate their organization in the

country so long as they sign up dedicated supporters who will vote.

With excitement surrounding an NDP-led provincial government and a membership that once boasted 100,000 provincially by Mr. Stewart's estimation, B.C. has the opportunity to be a kingmaker.

A Quebec question?

Western Canada is a strength for Mr. Singh, said Mr. MacLachlan, including urban and suburban Alberta.

B.C. will figure strongly, he agreed, estimating the number of members in Quebec is less than Saskatchewan and roughly equivalent to the Maritimes.

The Summa Strategies vice president who has yet to endorse a candidate said too much has been made of potential problems in Quebec, which represents almost half of current NDP MPs.

"I really just don't accept the notion that this candidate or another can't succeed in the region," said Mr. MacLachlan to the suggestion that as a Sikh who wears a turban, Mr. Singh will face resistance in the province.

Earlier this month former NDP MP [Pierre Dionne Labelle](#) told *Le Devoir* Quebecers "are not ready" for a candidate who wears "ostentatious signs" connected to their religion. After Quebec's Quiet Revolution in the 1960s rejecting the Catholic Church's influence in the province, it has held strong to secular values.

But Ms. Hay said that's not what organizers are hearing, describing Quebecers as "open."

"Their questions do revolve around what values motivate him in governing and whether or not it would be a separation of what people phrase as church and state—which is a very easy answer for him."

She said the team isn't shying away from the province, which is getting a "targeted campaign" and repeat visits from the leadership hopeful.

"We're offering something special to Quebec because there's a different conversation that needs to happen there with our candidate but we are going all in there."

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The Hill Times

Singh's national team of organizers

Michal Hay, campaign director

Nuvi Sidhu, field director

James Wardlaw, field director

- Nader Mohamed, digital director
- Lavleen Kaur, fundraising
- Aaron Webber, fundraising
- Brian Chang, operations director
- Étienne Graton, Quebec organizer
- Hannah Iland, tour director
- Harman Sehmbi, creative director
- Jared Walker, communications
- Willy Blomme, communications
- Jonathan Sas, policy director
- Melissa Bruno, advisor
- Navpreet Dhillon, national volunteer engagement coordinator
- Source: Jagmeet Singh's campaign

Samantha Wright Allen is a reporter for The Hill Times.











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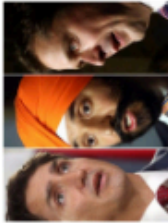
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