

National Post

\$10M received by Earncliffe since Liberals took power: Pollster EKOS earned \$61M

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The Earncliffe Strategy Group, an Ottawa consulting firm with close political ties to Prime Minister Paul Martin, has received more than \$10-million in federal government money since the Liberals took power, new documents show.

And another Ottawa polling firm that has sometimes worked with Earncliffe received more than \$61-million in the same period. Ottawa-based EKOS Research was awarded more than 1,600 contracts, mostly for public opinion research, from various departments, agencies and Crown corporations.

Records tabled in the House of Commons on Monday show that Earncliffe and its affiliates have received 269 contracts, amendments and standing offers since 1993.

During Mr. Martin's years as finance minister, his department repeatedly hired Earncliffe to do polling and focus groups and provide communications advice, often in advance of federal budgets.

The new records show Earncliffe received just under \$2-million from the Finance department alone.

The finance contracts last year became a subject of political storm as a former Public Works official alleged that the tendering was specially tailored to ensure the work always went to Earncliffe. The firm denied the allegation.

The records released this week show the firm also received \$849,000 in contracts and amendments from Health Canada, more than half of which were untendered.

In 16 of 25 cases, Earncliffe was determined to be the only firm capable of doing work described as "strategic communication advice" or "other professional services not otherwise specified."

It received another \$1-million from the Natural Resources department.

Before Mr. Martin became prime minister, many of his closest advisors worked at Earncliffe, and some referred to the Elgin Street firm as "the PMO-in-waiting."

The records were tabled in the House this week in response to a March order paper question from Conservative MP Dean Allison, a member of the House public accounts committee.