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news

Harper to Give Oct. 16 Throne Speech That May Trigger Election

By Theophilos Argitis and Greg Quinn

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Sept. 4 (Bloomberg) -- Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he'll give a speech outlining a new agenda for his minority government, which may trigger an election if opposition parties combine to reject the plan.

Harper pledged to detail the agenda in an Oct. 16 "Throne speech" after Parliament returns from a holiday, he said in an e-mailed statement today from Ottawa. The Conservative Party government is 29 seats short of a majority in the 308-seat House of Commons and needs opposition parties' support to pass laws and stay in power.

The 48-year-old Harper is trying to broaden his party's appeal beyond a rural, Western base of core supporters, with opinion surveys showing the Conservatives wouldn't win a majority of electoral districts in a new vote. Harper last month tried to improve the party's fortunes by shuffling his Cabinet and stripping Gordon O'Connor of the defense portfolio amid criticism of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

None of Canada's four main parties is poised to win a majority, according to a poll released Aug. 14 by SES Research. The Conservatives have support of 36 percent of Canadians, unchanged from the vote share the party got in the January 2006 election, and the main opposition Liberals are backed by 33 percent of voters. The survey of 1,001 was taken between July 28 and Aug. 4, with a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points.

The Conservatives have been in power 19 months, one longer than the average life-span of Canadian minority governments.

To contact the reporter on this story: Greg Quinn in Ottawa at gquinn1@bloomberg.net; Alexandre Deslongchamps in Ottawa at adeslongcham@bloomberg.net.

Last Updated: September 4, 2007 16:58 EDT

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