

## Election strategy tops Martin's dinner menu



**Federal cabinet ministers prepare for a meeting with the Prime Minister at 24 Sussex Drive in Ottawa**

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The Prime Minister's inner circle gathered at Sussex Drive to digest the pros and cons of a spring election, but the precise timing wasn't on the menu.

Emerging from the prime minister's residence after the dinner meeting of cabinet ministers Monday night, Health Minister Pierre Pettigrew insisted the subject of a general election never came up.

"No, no, that wasn't the object," he told reporters when prodded, explaining that their discussion centred on "issues."

Calling the evening a "very solid and great political moment," Pettigrew said it was "one of the best substantial political discussions I've seen in my years here in Ottawa."



**Health Minister Pierre Pettigrew after the meeting at 24 Sussex Drive**

Reporting from the capital, CTV's Mike Duffy said Pettigrew's comments come wrapped in a lot of "wink wink, nudge nudge."

Duffy said his sources told him that in the absence of a single unifying election theme, the cabinet was presented with Martin's grand plan for Canada's future.

"Essentially five or six major themes like health care and education, alongside regional sub-themes, that Martin plans to present to Canadians in the next two weeks."

With an eye on the election, Duffy said, it's part of a strategy to show Martin is an accomplished, visionary leader in contrast to his chief rival, Conservative leader Stephen Harper.

According to the polls, the most recent of which have all shown the Liberals mired in minority territory, dropping the election writ would require Martin to take a leap of faith.

### **Polls pose a problem**

"If the election is on the menu it won't taste very good," Ipsos-Reid pollster Darrell Bricker told CTV. "Because when you take a look at the numbers right now it's tough slogging for the Liberals."

The latest poll, released Monday by SES Canada Research, showed support for the Liberals at 40 per cent among decided voters -- a drop of eight per cent since the company's last poll 90 days earlier.

The Conservative Party was second with 27 per cent; the NDP third with 17 per cent and the Bloc Quebecois next with 12 per cent

support.

Duffy said the Liberals are already spinning the latest numbers as evidence of the Liberals creep back up the polls.

"They're saying tonight the glass isn't half empty," Duffy said.

"They're taking this as evidence the party is heading out of minority territory."

There are other signs pointing to an imminent call to the polls.

A number of larger-than-life examples are already dotting the landscape around Edmonton -- Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan's dozen campaign billboards.

Although she may be facing a tough race, other Western Liberals say they're confident in their party's chances.

Globe and Mail columnist Jane Taber told Canada AM on Monday that many believe Martin will make the election announcement on Mother's Day, May 9, with the vote to be held after a five-week campaign on June 14.

Since federal elections are traditionally held on Mondays, the other dates possible are June 7 and June 21. But a G8 summit on June 8 makes the 7th seem unlikely. And on June 20, Quebec will be going to the polls for a number of referenda, so holding a federal election the next day might be difficult.

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