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The Hill Times, February 12th, 2007  
**NEWS STORY**  
By Abbas Rana

# Ottawa Centre promises an interesting race in next election

**With four high-profile Libs, a well-known Conservative and an NDP incumbent, it all spells excitement in Ottawa Centre, highly-coveted riding.**

In what promises to be an exciting and hotly-contested race, four well-known and high-profile Liberals could seek the nomination of the highly-coveted Ottawa Centre, Ont., riding.

Penny Collenette, a former senior staffer in the Jean Chrétien PMO and currently a professor at the University of Ottawa, is interested in running. Richard Mahoney, an Ottawa lawyer, who ran unsuccessfully twice in the riding, is also interested, as is Isabel Metcalfe, a veteran Liberal, lobbyist and a former candidate who ran unsuccessfully in Carleton-Mississippi Mills, Ont., against Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor in the last election. As well, Scott Bradley, an executive with Bell Canada is also interested. All four live in the riding.

The Liberal Party of Canada in Ontario has not set a nomination date yet, but it's expected the party will announce the nominations in the province in the coming weeks.

NDP MP Paul Dewar won the riding in the 2006 election.

Conservative Brian McGarry recently said he is planning to run for the Conservative nomination in the riding as well.

For the Liberals, it will be the first time since 1987 that the riding will be hotly contested. In 2004, Mr. Mahoney won the nomination easily because of his strong organizational network and close personal and professional relationship with former

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- [Letters](#)

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Liberal leader Paul Martin (LaSalle-Émard, Que.).

In 1987, Liberal Senator Mac Harb—who represented the riding from 1988 to 2003 before his appointment to the Senate—won the nomination by defeating Maude Barlow. Ed Broadbent won the riding in 2004 and didn't run in 2006.

But with a new Grit leader in place, the dynamics have changed for Liberal contenders this time. Ms. Collenette, who worked as the director of appointments for then prime minister Jean Chrétien, has been networking in the riding for years. She is also married to former Liberal Cabinet minister David Collenette.

Ms. Metcalfe has connections and a network in the riding as well. She's also married to Herb Metcalfe, a top Ottawa lobbyist and a top adviser to Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion's (Saint-Laurent-Cartierville, Que.) successful Liberal leadership campaign.

Mr. Bradley, a former Hill staffer, is well-connected within Liberal circles.

Under the new campaign financing laws, all the prospective candidates have an equal playing field as well.

In the past, sometimes nomination contestants or organizers used to pay membership fees of new members. But that's now illegal.

Meanwhile, Ms. Metcalfe told The Hill Times last week that she is seriously considering her Ottawa Centre options. Ms. Metcalfe, who is originally from Almonte, Ont., which is in Carleton-Mississippi Mills, lost the last election by about 22,000 votes.

"This is my riding. I wanted the opportunity to run, it was an excellent experience [to run in Carleton-Mississippi Mills]. I liked it very much, I learned a lot. I'm now a seasoned, experienced campaigner. The really valuable lesson that I learned is that if you're going to serve as a Member of Parliament to your community, you have to know your community very, very well. You work for them and I think I know this community of Ottawa Centre because I've lived here for 30 years. I've been an activist for 30 years. My voluntary roots are here. I've served on a number of boards in this community and I think if you are going to serve your community, you have to know your community," said Ms. Metcalfe who supported former Liberal leadership candidate Bob Rae's unsuccessful leadership campaign but on the last ballot declared her support for Mr. Dion.

Ms. Metcalfe denied she's not considering Carleton-Mississippi Mills this time because it's unlikely she could win it.

For his part, Mr. Mahoney said he hasn't decided yet if he will run. But he conceded that he's meeting and greeting Liberals in the riding on a regular basis. Mr. Mahoney said one of the key reasons why he hasn't made up his mind is because nobody knows the timing of the next election and a nomination campaign has not been called.

In the last Liberal leadership campaign, Mr. Mahoney supported Mr. Rae's unsuccessful leadership campaign but moved to the Dion camp on the last ballot.

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Mr. Mahoney said although he ran in the riding unsuccessfully in the last two elections, he's hopeful that should he win the Liberal nomination, he could defeat NDP MP Paul Dewar in the next election. He explained that one of the reasons for his optimism is that since the last election, the federal Liberals have renewed their party and elected a new leader while the NDP support nationally has gone down.

"The combination of our renewal and the NDP's rather dramatic drop is going to be reflected in Ottawa Centre. You add that up with the fact that I have deep roots in the community and I'm known as a candidate. That combination gives me a great optimism," said Mr. Mahoney.

In the last general election, the NDP won 29 seats across the country with about 18 per cent support nationally. Recent public opinion polls show that the NDP support nationally is around 15 per cent, but an SES poll put the party back up to 17 per cent last week, nationally.

Ms. Collenette told *The Hill Times* that she believes the Liberals can win the riding in the next election because the NDP margin of victory in the last federal election went down to 5,153 votes from 6,256 votes in the 2004 federal election.

"First of all, the Liberal Party has turned a page and we have a very inspiring new leader who is certainly demonstrating a lot of energy and a lot of momentum. No. 2, if you analyse the results of the last election, the NDP MP Mr. Dewar actually went down in his percentage," said Ms. Collenette who in the last leadership campaign remained neutral but her husband and son Chris Collenette, a former Liberal ministerial staffer supported Liberal MP Michael Igantieff's (Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Ont.) unsuccessful leadership campaign.

Meanwhile, Sen. Harb and Ontario Health Promotion Minister Jim Watson are endorsing Ms. Collenette if she decides to run.

Mr. Bradley, meanwhile, said through his candidacy, he is offering a generational change to the Liberal Party.

"I certainly don't have the insider credentials that they have and, from my end, what differentiates me from other candidates is, in fact, that to the general public, I'm a new face, a new name, certainly someone who has been a loyal Liberal through both of the last two Prime Ministers, but at the same time, I have never been a deep insider or part of the backroom gang. I have just been a loyal Liberal and what differentiates myself is that the fact that I represent the next generation of Liberals," said Mr. Bradley who supported former Ontario education minister Gerard Kennedy's unsuccessful leadership campaign but on the third ballot moved to the Dion leadership campaign along with an overwhelming majority of the Kennedy supporters.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dewar told *The Hill Times* that he holds all the potential Liberal nomination contestants in high regard.

"I equally respect each one of them....They're all formidable candidates. They seem to be people who take [politics] seriously be it Isabel or Penny or Scott and I know Mr. Mahoney from the last election. They're all of equal weight and value to their party and it's up to their party to decide who the best person is and it's up to the

people of Ottawa Centre to decide who they want as their representative," said Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Dewar dismissed his party's drop in the margin of victory in the riding in the last election as inside baseball.

"I don't think you can make any assumptions based on national polls and trends here in Ottawa Centre because, at the end of the day, that's the in-between election talk and when you have an election, it's about who's going to best represent" the riding.

Meanwhile, *Ottawa Citizen* reported last week that Ottawa businessman and former regional councillor Brian McGarry is planning on running in Ottawa Centre as a star candidate for the Conservative Party.

"I've been asked by a number of people to run. I've met with a number of people and I'm going to meet with more, including Senate Leader Marjory LeBreton and people in the PMO," Mr. McGarry said in an interview with *Citizen*. "I am considering it very seriously and I can say at this moment that I am virtually running. Unless I hear something terribly disappointing from the people I'm talking to, it is a go."

Since the creation of the riding in 1968, Conservatives have won it only once in 1978. Progressive Conservative Robert de Cotret won it in a byelection but lost in the next general election in 1979 to Liberal John Evans.

In the 2006 election, Conservative candidate Keith Fountain came in third place with 15,126 votes, or 22.7 per cent of the vote.

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