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SUN News National/World

Sun, June 3, 2007

Grits, Tories in dead heat

...with NDP poised to wield balance of power: Poll

By **ANTONELLA ARTUSO**, QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU CHIEF

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR



TORONTO -- Dalton McGuinty's Liberals and John Tory's Conservatives are in an absolute dead heat heading into a long and hot summer on the political hustings, according to a SES Research poll obtained by Sun Media.

The survey gives both leading parties 29.8% support among decided voters, with the NDP at 16% and the Green Party at 9.3%. Undecided voters account for 15.3%.

"We're seeing a real dogfight here; neither party has the upper hand; neither party has momentum," says pollster Nik Nanos. "I think we're looking at a really volatile political situation."

All three leaders -- McGuinty, Tory and the NDP's Howard Hampton -- trail their own parties in popularity.

Asked who would be the best premier, 26.8% opt for McGuinty, 26.5% for Tory, 13% for Hampton and 4.2% for Green Leader Frank de Jong.

The poll also finds that 35.3% think the government is headed in the right direction, while 46% believe it's on the wrong track.

Nearly half (48%) describe McGuinty's performance as premier as "average," 25.6% rate his performance as very good or good, and 21.3% see it as poor or very poor.

"You're not seeing negative reaction to McGuinty -- it's not as if Ontarians don't like the premier," the pollster says. "I think the key word to describe



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their feelings is ambivalence."

But Liberal support among young people and women -- a traditional strength of the party -- is showing some erosion, Nanos notes.

He says the poll points to the possibility of a minority government Oct. 10.

In that case, Hampton could find himself wielding the balance of power.

"If there's any kind of silver lining strategy for anyone, it's Howard Hampton," Nanos says.

One member of a key government stakeholder group, who requested anonymity, says for the first time, his organization is buying tickets to the NDP's key fundraiser, set for this Wednesday.

"If there's a minority government, Howard Hampton on Oct. 11 will be the most powerful politician at Queen's Park," the stakeholder source says. "The NDP are back."

Adds NDP MPP Peter Kormos: "It's time to start calling him Mr. Hampton."

Nanos says the poll does show NDP vulnerability to the Greens, who could pick up seats for the first time.

"They could be spoilers for the New Democrats in a number of critical seats in Ontario," Nanos says.

SES Research polled 500 Ontarians between May 11-15. The poll is considered accurate to within plus or minus 4.4%.

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