

November 12, 2006

Grit hopefuls a turnoff, poll says

By **ALAN FINDLAY**, PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

None of the four main contenders to become the next federal Liberal leader has the drawing power to woo more party voters into the Grit tent than he would repel, a new Sun Media-SES Research survey suggests.

Comparing voters' preferences in the last federal election to their take on the Grit contenders, only former Ontario NDP premier Bob Rae shows any potential to turn another party's voters Liberal.

SES Research president Nik Nanos said the finding 29.6% of people who voted NDP last election would more likely vote Liberal under Rae was the most striking of the poll's results.

"He has appeal as a Liberal option with New Democratic supporters," said Nanos. "He's a safe place to park for NDP supporters who might be thinking Liberal."

That result is tempered, however, by the 22.2% who voted NDP in the last election and say they would be less likely to consider the Grits under Rae's helm. Even so, that net gain is the only positive finding for the Liberals.

The 1,002-person survey first asked respondents what party they voted for in the past federal election (the poll nearly mirrors the actual election results). They were then asked about their response to each of the top four Grit candidates.

POACHERS

The results puncture claims by other candidates they can poach voters from the other parties' camps.

Frontrunner Michael Ignatieff scores poorly among NDP voters, with twice as many (28.7% versus 14.1%) saying they would be less likely to vote for an Ignatieff-led party than those who would lean more toward the Grits under the former Harvard scholar.

"His foreign policy stance just does not have traction with New Democratic options," said Nanos. "In a way he might be seen like Stephen Harper for foreign policy issues."

Stephane Dion, the ex-cabinet minister from Quebec, drives away twice as many recent Bloc Quebecois voters (29.3%) than he attracts (14.3%), according to those surveyed. Tory voters were even more reluctant to switch under a Dion-led Liberal party (22.5% less likely versus 8.8% more likely).

"He's a bit of a victim of his own pro-federalist stance in his own province," said Nanos.

Overall, Dion and former Ontario cabinet minister Gerard Kennedy fared the worst in terms of drawing power.

Almost twice as many survey respondents said they would be less tempted to vote Liberal with Kennedy as leader than those more likely (21.1% versus 11.8%).

The poll, conducted this week, is considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.