

Tories promise new tax cut, trail Liberals

Fri Dec 9, 2005 3:43 PM EST

OTTAWA (Reuters) - The Conservatives, trailing the Liberals in the election campaign, promised a \$2.2 billion tax cut over five years for senior citizens on Friday.

Conservative leader Stephen Harper said if he became prime minister he would double to \$2,000 the amount of pension income that seniors can shelter from income tax.

But, despite a series of key announcements by the Conservatives early in the campaign, ahead of the January 23 election day, the Liberal lead in the polls has remained steady or even widened.

"Our campaign is to get out there with an agenda of positive change," Harper said, acknowledging that public attention is divided in the run-up to Christmas.

Harper has also pledged to cut the federal sales tax, establish a guaranteed maximum waiting time for health care, and to provide an annual C\$1,200 child care grant.

For his part, Prime Minister Paul Martin has promised to ban most handguns and has also doubled to 10 years the Liberals' child care program, which previously was set for five years.

A Strategic Counsel poll, conducted for The Globe and Mail and CTV News, shows the Liberals have the support of 36 percent of voters across the country down from 37 percent the party won in the 2004 election.

The Conservatives are unchanged at 30 percent, the New Democrats have 15 percent, down one percentage point.

But a Leger Marketing poll released on Thursday put the Liberals ahead with 39 percent of decided voters -- nearly what is required to regain a majority in Parliament -- with the Conservatives at 27 percent and the New Democrats at 16 percent.

Also on Thursday, a tracking poll of 1,200 people by SES Research for the CPAC television channel put the Liberals at 41 percent compared with 26 percent for the Conservatives and 18 percent for the New Democrats.

Each day SES polls 400 new people and drops off 400 who were surveyed three days earlier.

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