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# Comment Commentary

Sun, November 19, 2006



## EDITORIAL: Conservatives, don't go wobbly

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LETTER TO  
 THE EDITOR

While we're sometimes skeptical of pollsters, Nik Nanos' SES Research is one of the best. SES nailed the results of the last federal election, correctly predicting every major party's percentage of the popular vote within one-tenth of one percent.

So when Nanos said last week that Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives and the leaderless Liberals are virtually tied nationally (34-32%), and that Tory support in Quebec has collapsed to 12%, we believe him.

That's down from 24.6% in the January election, when Harper won 10 seats there.

His support of Canada's military mission in Kandahar and his lack of support for Kyoto -- both unpopular positions in Quebec -- are believed to be responsible.

This suggests, to some, that the smart thing for Harper to do if he wants to win the next election is to climb down from these views.

That's because the conventional wisdom is that Tory support in Quebec is vital to the party's chances of winning the next election.

We disagree with such a strategy. Here's why. Harper's biggest strength with voters -- his "brand" in our view -- is that he makes tough decisions and sticks to them.

We disagree with those pundits who say that since

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the Liberals are already competitive without a leader, they'll automatically crush the Conservatives once they have one.

That's an absurdly premature conclusion. Right now, Harper is running against a theoretically perfect Liberal leader -- since there isn't one -- onto which voters can project their own values and beliefs. That will end once the Liberals choose a leader two weeks from now. And each of the four frontrunners has baggage.

Michael Ignatieff also supports our mission in Afghanistan (so do we, but it's unpopular in Quebec), has little political experience and, while intelligent, has shown an alarming tendency to put his foot in his mouth and chew on it.

(You can read national affairs columnist Greg Weston's interview with and assessment of Ignatieff in today's Comment section on Pages 4 and 5.)

Bob Rae doesn't have a seat in Parliament, used to be a New Democrat, and when he was an NDPer, presided over five years of huge deficits and tax hikes as Ontario premier.

Gerard Kennedy, Ontario's former education minister, has no seat in Parliament, no federal experience and has not made a major impact in Quebec.

Stephane Dion isn't well-known in Ontario and is a polarizing figure in Quebec for his staunch support of Canadian unity -- which we admire, by the way.

We're not saying it's impossible for any of these men to lead the Liberals to victory in the next election.

We're saying it's by no means certain. And now is not the time for Conservatives to go wobbling, for example, by throwing money at Quebec, (or any other province) as they've been doing recently in a bid to buy support.

That's what the Liberals tried to do before the last election. Look where it got them.  
**Next story: EDITORIAL: PM stands tall on China**



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