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Sun, February 6, 2005

MPs' seats at stake

Voters want reps to reflect gay-marriage views: poll

By BILL RODGERS, Ottawa Bureau Chief

OTTAWA -- Almost 42% of Canadian voters say they would bounce their MP from office in the next election if they do not reflect their view on the hot button issue of same-sex marriage, according to a SES poll. The survey of 1,000 voters shows the country evenly split with 46.2% favouring the traditional definition of marriage and 45% who support extending marriage to gay and lesbian couples.

More than 54% of Canadians say they want their MP to vote based on the views expressed in his or her riding. Only 21.8% would respect an MP voting his or her conscience and slightly more than 16% would agree to their MP voting the way their party tells them to.

"It's a crystal clear message," said SES pollster Nik Nanos. "Canadians want MPs to represent their views and for those that do not -- watch out."

HUGE ISSUE

It's a warning many elected members aren't taking lightly. Nova Scotia New Democrat Peter Stoffer, who is voting in favour of same-sex marriage, said it's possible some MPs will lose their seats over the same-sex marriage issue.

"If that is the only issue that somebody will vote on and if they feel strongly enough an (MP) could lose their vote," Stoffer said. "And don't forget out West people lost their seats because of (supporting) the gun legislation."

Provencher MP Vic Toews says changing the



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definition of marriage is a huge issue in both urban and rural ridings across Canada and the outcome of the Commons vote could determine whether many MPs are given the boot in the next election.

"Absolutely, and I think that people want (a) referendum because they feel that MPs are not going to vote in accordance with their wishes," said the Conservative MP who will vote against changing the definition of marriage.

The SES poll shows 52.8% of voters would not use the issue to vote against their MP if his or her view differed from theirs.

Support for same-sex marriage is highest in Atlantic Canada and Quebec and lowest in Ontario and the West. The survey found 39.7% favour same-sex marriage in Canada's most populous province while 49% are opposed and 4.3% are unsure. In the West, 43.1% are in favour, 48.9% are opposed with 4.3% undecided.

More people support gay and lesbian marriage than oppose it in Quebec and the Atlantic region. The poll found 50.8% support in Quebec, with 42.4% opposed, and in the Atlantic provinces 53% support while 38% are opposed.

Nanos says the issue is so divisive across the country that "there is no clear winner on this, but there could be a lot of (political) casualties."

The SES telephone survey was conducted between Jan. 28 and Feb. 2 and is considered accurate plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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