



RELEASE DATE: November 4, 2006

NEWS RELEASE

Liberal Race Shaping up as Cliffhanger

The federal Liberals' leadership convention next month is shaping up as high drama. Although Michael Ignatieff emerged from "super-weekend" with a substantial lead over the second-place candidate, Bob Rae, the two men are in a dead heat when Liberal delegates are asked which they would prefer to see win. Meanwhile, Stephane Dion is stronger than either of the two leading candidates as a second choice, has the lowest negatives of the leading candidates, and with the right breaks could find himself on the final ballot. Even Gerard Kennedy has enough potential second and third choice support to be considered a possible contender.

"This looks like it will be one of those leadership conventions that people will talk about for years," said EKOS President Frank Graves. "With a race this tight, a great convention speech, a last minutes gaffe, or the manoeuvres of the lower-tier candidates and their organizers could provide the puff of wind to put one of the candidates over the top.

EKOS conducted a poll of more than 1100 elected delegates to the Liberal leadership convention this week, over a quarter of the total. The poll did not include "ex officio" delegates such as Members of Parliament and riding presidents.

Elected delegates are bound by party rules to vote for a particular candidate on the first ballot, which guarantees Ignatieff the lead in the first round of voting. However, Ignatieff has less room to grow after that. The poll shows that Rae draws substantially more of the second choice support from candidates likely to drop off in the early ballots than does Ignatieff. Dion, meanwhile, starts well behind both Ignatieff and Rae in first ballot support, but has even more potential to grow than Rae.

OTTAWA OFFICE
99 Metcalfe Street, Suite 1100
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L7
T: 613.235.7215
F: 613.235.8498

TORONTO OFFICE
480 University Avenue, Suite 1006
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1V2
T: 416.598.8002
F: 416.598.2543

EDMONTON OFFICE
9925 109th St. NW, Suite 606
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2J8
T: 780.408.5225
F: 780.408.5233

Ignatieff has the most negatives of any of the candidates by a sizeable margin. His commitment to officially recognizing Quebec as a nation, while popular among his own supporters has no resonance among the supporters of other candidates. In fact, a substantial majority of the delegates polled not only reject the idea of adopting official recognition of Quebec's nationhood as policy, they also reject the applying the term "nation" to Quebec conceptually. This could end up being Ignatieff's Achilles heel (although his strongest asset is a clean advantage on perceived ability to win in an ensuing election). In order to prevent stalling on third ballot, he must soften his attachment to and ownership of the recognition concept.

Bob Rae has the available second and third choice support to go over the top and is not hampered by a "winnability" problem. His twin challenges will be to ensure that his first ballot positioning as *the* Ignatieff alternative is sustained in later ballots and to clearly attach the unpopular recognition concept to Ignatieff and not him.

Dion has the lowest negatives among the major candidates: he is the man that everyone seems prepared to consider. Yet Dion's incipient support may not be easy to capitalize upon. His supporters are less certain to come to the convention, and much less likely than those of other candidates to think that he can win the next election if chosen leader.

Gerard Kennedy's situation is in many ways the mirror image of Dion's. His supporters are fiercely loyal, determined to come to the convention, and convinced that he is the man to beat the Conservatives in the next election. However, the confidence of his supporters finds relatively few echoes among supporters of other candidates. At the moment, he appears to be in the weakest position of the four leading candidates to pick up support after the first ballot.

Interestingly, both Ignatieff and Rae have a small but significant number of delegates -- 11% in both cases -- bound to them by the rules on the first ballot but who are already migrating to other candidates in terms of their personal preferences.

"In many leadership conventions, these relatively small differences in patterns of support might not be important," said Graves. "But with the race so close, even a small amount of churning among the candidates could produce changes in their rankings after the first ballot that would set one candidate on a path to victory and relegate another to the category of also-rans."

METHODOLOGY

The EKOS survey sampled 1,124 Liberal Party of Canada delegates between October 31 and November 2, 2006. A sample of this size produces a statistical margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when the results are subdivided (i.e. error margins for sub-groups). Note that the ex-officio delegates are not included in the sample.

All the data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's region and 1st ballot support composition reflects that of the actual population of voting delegates at the December leadership convention. Regional proportions were adjusted to account for the lack of delegates from British Columbia in the sample frame, due to that province being under review by the LPC at the time of the poll.