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## Eves' plea to Tories: Don't give up

Premier says 'huge silent majority' supports his party  
'I don't think it is a Liberal juggernaut,' supporters told

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QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

KITCHENER—Premier Ernie Eves yesterday put on a brave face as the latest round of polls show the Tories in a freefall, insisting it's not game over for his party and urging supporters to "work their buns off" in the final days of the campaign.

"We're down to the wire in this election campaign and we are not going to give up," Eves said. "We are going to fight until Oct. 2 because I believe there is a huge silent majority out there (supporting) our candidates."

Eves took his campaign on a five-city tour yesterday — also visiting London, Cambridge, Toronto and Ottawa — exhorting party faithful to do all they can to get the vote out on election day, this Thursday.

"I don't think it is a Liberal juggernaut," he said. "I think that there are many people out there who are still deciding in their own minds which party is going to best represent their values."

A poll in yesterday's Star showed the Tories behind in every region, and behind in every age and income group. Only among rural voters are the Tories and Liberals neck and neck.

Similar poll results were also reported yesterday in the Globe and Mail, London Free Press and the Kitchener area. Sources say the Tories own internal polls are showing similar results.

The Star poll, conducted by EKOS Research Associates showed the Liberals with a commanding 47.5 per cent of decided voter support, compared with 31 per cent for the Progressive Conservatives and 17 per cent for the NDP, up from 13 per cent after the first week of the election campaign. The poll showed 12.6 per cent undecided.

Yesterday, Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty, 48, speaking to about 80 Oxford County residents said: "We got some good news in the polls today — good, now forget it. It doesn't count. There's only one poll that counts."

In Waterloo, NDP Leader Howard Hampton, 51, said the poll results confirm what he saw all last week. "We know we've got momentum coming out of the leadership debate. The Conservatives are falling like a stone. The Liberals peaked too early. We've come up five points just since the debate alone."

But Eves, 57, pointed out that he has "been in many election campaigns, especially my first one in 1981, when so-called pundits and pollsters wrote us off. I was supposed to lose that election.

"I didn't listen to the pundits and the pollsters," Eves said. "I worked my buns off every day as I'm doing in this campaign and as these candidates are and I can tell you when we do that on Oct. 2 we will have a third consecutive majority government."

But some Tory cabinet ministers and MPPs struggling to hold on to their seats weren't as optimistic.

"It's still a three-way race and I haven't slept in the last couple of days, worrying about it," said Gerry Martiniuk

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(Cambridge).

Universities Minister Dianne Cunningham (London-North Centre) said newspapers shouldn't be allowed to publish polls because they turn off potential supporters.

"I think some day somebody might say we shouldn't be publishing polls," she told reporters. "I think it makes people feel discouraged, I think it turns people away.

"It's very hard I think on candidates ... to get up in the morning and see that 400 people say everybody is going to lose their seats," Cunningham said, referring to a survey conducted by local polling company, Acumen Research Group Inc., which found the Liberals have a runaway lead in all four of London's ridings — including her own.

In the Kitchener-Waterloo region one poll indicated all four area Tories were headed for defeat, including Education Minister Elizabeth Witmer.

Despite saying he was confident his party would win the election, Eves said he would stay on as MPP for the riding of Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey even if the Liberals win.

"I am running to represent the people in my riding for the next four years. The people in my riding and every riding deserve that commitment," he said, also adding that he will continue to serve as party leader.

Senior Tory sources told the Star yesterday that their own internal polling was "not as bad" as the EKOS Research Associates and Ipsos-Reid results.

"We show a bit better (in Tory polling)," said one official.

"We're just staying focused on the job at hand." Another insider said while there is some "sniping" going on within the Tory campaign about who is to blame for the impending defeat, most people are remaining calm.

One party official said the Tories are relying on their election day "get-out-the-vote" machine to prevent a huge Liberal majority.

Culture Minister David Tsubouchi, who is co-chairing the Tory campaign, said the poll results don't jibe with the reaction he's getting from voters.

"My experience out at the door, out on the ground, is quite different from the polls and I have to think that's consistent with our candidates out there."

But Tsubouchi admitted the campaign is a "struggle."

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