



Sep. 27, 2003. 01:18 PM

## When all is said and done, it's about leadership

The real people in new opinion poll  
Respondents have strong views

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Anna Totten is so hopeful the Liberals will form a majority government that she's voting NDP. Andrew Howe is unsure *where* he'll cast his ballot — but not for whom. And David Boyle sees only one clear choice on Ontario's political landscape: the Progressive Conservatives.

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They are some of the voices behind the numbers, the people whose opinions are poked and prodded, their political leanings analyzed, their off-the-cuff comments capable of making a campaign manager cringe or a spin doctor smile.

Slightly more than 1,000 Ontarians were polled by EKOS Research for the Star on the two days following Tuesday's leaders' debate. The poll found that 48 per cent intend to vote for the Liberals, 31 per cent the Tories and 17 per cent the NDP.

Education, health, hydro, same-sex marriage, public auto insurance and mortgage deductibility were some of the topics for which respondents were asked to give their opinion. But for many of those same respondents contacted by the Star after the pollsters were finished, this race boils down to leadership.

"I think they're all a bunch of losers, in a sense," says the 61-year-old Boyle, chuckling. "But my conservative roots are strong, and I think we'd better pay attention to the economy if we want to afford education and health care."

A management consultant who lives in North York, Boyle tuned into Tuesday evening's debate — "pretty boring stuff, actually" — and saw nothing from McGuinty or Hampton that would make him change his vote. Boyle voted for the Tories in 1995 and 1999.

"Mr. Eves is no Mr. Harris," he says, targeting the economy as the most important issue of the election. "But I think he's a fiscal conservative, and I would support that."

Though he disagrees with Boyle's political leanings, Howe, a 20-year-old student studying in Waterloo, agrees with his assessment of the leadership abilities of Eves, McGuinty and Hampton.

"None of them are very likeable," Howe says. "Dalton McGuinty may be the best premier, but he doesn't stand out to me. Howard Hampton just doesn't seem to have a plan that would truly work, and I can't imagine the NDP being elected. And I don't like the Conservatives."

Although he has ruled out the Tories, Howe still isn't sure who he'll be voting for. He isn't sure whether he votes in his home riding of Niagara Centre — in which case he'd choose NDP incumbent Peter Kormos — or if he casts his ballot in Waterloo, in which case he'd vote for the local Liberal candidate.

"I just don't like conservative politics. I'm not a fan," he says. "I like more social programs. I don't like how the Tories have been handling education.

"I have sympathy for the teachers — and I don't like how (the Conservatives) have handled privatization."

Grace Danen, 70, is retired and lives in Tillsonburg. The Tuesday debate was one of the first times she's paid attention to the election campaign. Still undecided, Danen says the election comes "at a very difficult time. I don't know.

"To me, they sounded like three angry boys," Danen says. "It didn't help, but it brought me down to two."

After watching the three debate, Danen — who cites auto insurance as a hot-button issue — decided she won't vote Liberal. But she is amused by the choice she must now make between the New Democrats and the Conservatives, for whom she voted in 1995 and 1999.

"On one hand, they tell you Ontario is really in debt, and on the other hand, they tell you everything is really good," she says. "I haven't really made up my mind, and I'll follow it really closely for the next week.

"In a way, I really feel bad I eliminated the Liberals, but (McGuinty) just doesn't do it for me."

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**'Mr. Eves is no Mr. Harris. But I think he's a fiscal conservative, and I would support that'**

***David Boyle***

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Some respondents contacted by the Star couldn't recall the name of the premier — "Is it Ed?" one woman asked — and others said they wouldn't vote at all because they "haven't got enough knowledge."

Others, like the 41-year-old Totten, consider themselves very well informed. Though she describes herself as a Liberal and has been working for a Liberal candidate, Totten intends to vote for incumbent Marilyn Churley, the NDP candidate in her home riding. Totten sounds torn when she describes Jim Davidson, the Liberal candidate, as a good person, but says she's concerned that the anti-Tory vote could be split.

"I'm voting strategically," Totten says. "I don't want to divide the vote and chance George Sardelis, the PC person, getting in."

"I guess I'm hopeful that a change in government will mean a change in education, and health. I just feel the Conservatives were too regimented, too in-the-box. Everything came down to a formula, instead of a human need."

"I think what they've done in schools — with the funding formula — is just totally ridiculous. We're giving money to schools based on square footage? Where are the kids?"

Totten is also put off by Tory campaign literature that she says linked immigration and crime — "I thought that was an awful stereotype" — and likes the Liberal message of healing a divided province.

"I think being in the teaching profession, we've been a scapegoat," she says. "There's always a group that's been the scapegoat."

"I think it's a Liberal sweep. It's a good thing," she adds. "We definitely need a change from the Conservatives."

As a teacher in the separate school system — and as a parent who sends her son to St. Michael's Choir School, which is private — she is unimpressed with the Conservative tax break for parents who choose private schools for their children.

"We chose to have him there because he's got a certain talent," Totten says of her decision, but notes that she did get a tax break on her son's tuition. "But I disagree with them."

And 60-year-old Bert Zwiers disagrees with Totten.

A retired construction site manager, Zwiers knew he'd be voting Conservative when he heard Eves trying to force McGuinty to answer a question about the province's finances. But the Tory platform also addresses a number of issues that are important to him, including mortgage interest deductibility and private education.

"It was in the debate when Mr. Eves asked Mr. McGuinty about how he'd make up the deficit," he says. "It's politics, which didn't surprise me at all. I'm a senior, I'm 60, I'm retired, I'm on a fixed income. I need all the help I can get, on my mortgage, on my taxes. And I'm a big supporter of private education."

"It's an atrocity that this is the only province where that's not supported," says Zwiers, who has voted Liberal and Conservative in the past. "Before I heard that platform, I wasn't sure what I would vote."

Marjorie Hewitt wasn't sure she would vote at all until the pollsters contacted her. The 78-year-old retiree, who lives in Petrolia, near Sarnia, says "I figured I gave my opinion, so I should."

In the last election, Hewitt voted for the Conservatives — "but I wish to God I never had."

"What gets me is they promise people so much, and then they get in and forget everything they ever said," she says, adding that she intends to vote Liberal this time. She watched the debate, and that made up her mind in favour of McGuinty.

"He comes across that he could be an honest man," Hewitt says. "Whereas Eves, he's too much of a bull.....er."

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