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Tory cabinet won't survive, Hampton says

Claims Liberals have peaked

Says his party is gaining support

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WATERLOO—Encouraged by polls showing the NDP making gains and the Progressive Conservatives collapsing, Howard Hampton predicts Ontario Premier Ernie Eves' entire cabinet could be swept away on Thursday.

"The Conservatives will be lucky if any of their cabinet ministers survive this election campaign," Hampton told 75 cheering supporters yesterday.

"The Conservatives," he added, "are going to be very lucky if they can hang on to even a quarter of the seats that they had."

At dissolution, the Tories held 56 seats, the Liberals 36, the NDP nine, with one Independent and one vacancy.

Asked whether he thought Eves would lose his own seat in Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, Hampton said: "That would be for the voters to decide. But it's pretty clear that the Conservatives are going down virtually everywhere across the province."

Hampton, 51, pointed to the Toronto Star-EKOS Research Associates poll released yesterday as proof the New Democrats are headed in the right direction.

"The Conservatives are falling like a stone," he said. "The Liberals peaked too early. We've come up five points just since the debate alone. We know change is now going to happen."

The Star survey, conducted last Wednesday and Thursday of 1,023 voters, shows Dalton McGuinty's Liberals leading with 47.5 per cent of decided voter support, the Tories with 31 per cent and the NDP with 17 per cent up from 13 per cent. It is considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The number of respondents who were undecided came in at 12.6 per cent.

An Ipsos-Reid poll of 1,001 people recorded similar results with the Liberals at 48 per cent, the Tories at 31 per cent and the NDP at 15 per cent with 13 per cent undecided.

"They confirm what I've been saying for the last four days," Hampton said. "The Conservatives are in the tank and the tank is draining very quickly. The Liberals peaked too soon and we're the only people picking up support."

Addressing complaints by Eves that journalists have given McGuinty an easy ride this election by not pinning him down on key issues, such as how the Liberals can afford their platform, Hampton said the Premier had a point.

"Can I trust someone who won't answer the questions?" he said of McGuinty. "Can I trust someone who's always shifting their point of view? I would hope that over the next five days not only the people of Ontario, but the media would ask those tough questions, too."

Dan Lajoie, a quadriplegic activist and business owner, who is the NDP candidate trying to topple Education Minister Elizabeth Witmer in Kitchener-Waterloo, said there is increasing support at the local level for the party.

"I feel completely confident. We are breaking boundaries where nobody thought we would," Lajoie said. "We've got

the momentum."

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