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Economy Rises to Top of Voters' Concerns As Political Situation Becomes More Volatile

(OTTAWA)--The economy has emerged as the number one priority for Canadians for the first time in a decade as support for the federal Conservatives has stalled in battleground provinces Quebec and Ontario according to a new national survey by the Gandalf Group released today.

"In public opinion terms, concern over the economy is a major development and means that parties and politicians will have their economic plans scrutinized by the public more than has been the case for some time," said David Herle Principal of the Gandalf Group.

Fully 91% of those polled identified the need to keep the economy strong as important to their vote in the next federal election, as compared to 84% who chose protecting the environment and 83% who chose reducing health care wait times. A further two thirds of Canadians said that getting Canada out of the war in Afghanistan would be important to how they vote – a factor that, at 71%, is substantially more significant in Quebec.

"The good news for the Conservatives is that they are holding steady at the national level with the same level of support as they harvested on Election Day," observed Jennifer Espey, Gandalf Principal. "The bad news is that they are losing ground slightly in Ontario and Quebec – two provinces critical to their re-election strategy where concerns such as the economy, environment and the war in Afghanistan also rank high."

Other key findings of the Gandalf Group survey include:

- Health care and, specifically, reduction of wait times, remains a very important issue to Canadians in every region of the country and is particularly important for women voters.
- The fiscal imbalance is a key vote determinant in Quebec – but not significant in the ROC.
- Two hot button issues - Conservative support for Israel and its intention to re-open the same sex marriage debate – are relatively low in importance to voters.
- In Ontario, the Conservatives and the NDP could lose seats to the Liberals who have widened their lead to 39% over 32% for the Conservatives and 16% for the NDP – with the Green Party notching a significant 12% of popular support.
- In Quebec, the Conservatives and the Liberals would be in peril of losing seats to the Bloc Quebecois who have rebounded to 42% of popular support as compared to 23% for the Conservatives and 20% for the Liberals. The current numbers could result in as many as 60 BQ seats. At 8% and 4%, respectively, neither the NDP nor the Green Party are significant factors currently in the minds of Quebec voters.

"Beneath a mask of complacent national numbers, noteworthy regional swings and important shifts in voter priorities can be detected," said Herle. "We could be entering a season of significant change in attitudes that will affect the fortunes of all political parties."

The Gandalf Group survey was conducted among 1000 adult Canadians between September 6 to 9 2006. Its results are considered reliable with a 3.1% margin of error. A copy of the full poll results can be accessed at www.gandalfgroup.ca

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