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No Runaway Among Liberal Frontrunners Dryden Most Widely Appealing

(OTTAWA)--There is no runaway choice among the front running candidates for the leadership of the federal Liberal Party according to a new national survey by the Gandalf Group released today that surveyed opinions among both Liberal voters and the public as a whole.

"Its still early and opinion is still forming about the candidates. At this stage, each of the presumed frontrunners – Mr. Ignatieff, Mr. Rae, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Dion – comes with upside potential and downside risks based on voters' perceptions," commented David Herle Principal of the Gandalf Group. "Only Ken Dryden can confidently claim that he would widen the Liberal Party's appeal among voters right across the country."

Among Canadians, Ken Dryden was the choice of 19% for Liberal leader with Bob Rae coming second at 17%, followed by Michael Ignatieff (10%), and Stephane Dion (8%). Gerrard Kennedy garnered only 4% support. Among Liberals, the results were similar, with Mr. Dryden and Mr. Rae tied for top pick with 19%, followed by Ignatieff (12%), Dion (8%) and Kennedy (7%).

Candidate	National	Liberal Voters
Ken Dryden	19	19
Bob Rae	17	19
Michael Ignatieff	10	12
Stephane Dion	8	8
Carolyn Bennett	6	5
Gerard Kennedy	4	7
Scott Brison	3	4
Martha Hall Findlay	2	1
Joe Volpe	1	1
Hedy Fry	1	1
DK/ref	29	23

"Obviously, name recognition is a significant factor but the ability to attract voters from other political parties and grow the Liberal Party base is, in the long run, even more important," said Mr. Herle.

Ken Dryden offers the widest appeal among voters – with only 34% of Canadians saying that they are certain to not vote Liberal if he is leader. More than 40% of NDP, BQ and Conservative voters would consider voting Liberal if he were leader. For the presumed frontrunners, the picture is far more mixed:

- Bob Rae polarizes voters quite dramatically, particularly in Ontario. Well known and with a following, Mr. Rae will attract sizable consideration from current NDP and Bloc voters. However, Conservative voters are dead set against his leadership and fully 43% of Ontarians would be certain to not vote Liberal with him as leader.
- Stephane Dion's appeal differs dramatically between Quebec and the ROC. In Quebec, Dion actually helps the Liberal Party's fortunes with 31% of voters in that province saying they would be certain or likely to vote Liberal if he lead the Party – meaning he is running roughly 11% ahead of the Party. However, his ability to attract Conservative and NDP voters in the ROC is weak.
- Michael Ignatieff suffers from comparatively low name recognition but offers the possibility of upside growth. He is capturing some of the desire of Canadians for something new and different in politics. Foreign policy will be his most difficult area. He has expertise in that area which Canadians believe is important, but is not positioned right now to benefit from the increasing desire – especially among Liberal voters - for a foreign policy more distinct from US policy.
- Gerrard Kennedy is generally considered to be doing well among the Liberal membership but has yet to make an impression with the general public.

“The Party faces some difficult choices based on this data. Is it too late to take another look at Ken Dryden? Do you take a chance on the potential Dion upside in Quebec knowing there may be resistance to him in the rest of Canada? Is it more important to pull votes from the NDP – which Rae might do best – or from the Conservatives, which Ignatieff or Dryden are likely best placed to do?” Gandalf Principal Jennifer Espey concluded.

Finally, the poll suggested the possibility that a wider debate over Mr. Ignatieff's proposal to re-open constitutional talks could become an influential factor in the race for leader. Keeping Canada united is the single highest priority identified by Liberals in a new leader.

“If this debate over Quebec's role in the constitution heats up, it could have a determinative impact on this race's outcome,” Herle observed. “If Mr. Ignatieff were able to persuade Liberals that his suggestion would aid the cause of national unity, he could reap significant benefits. It has equal potential to backfire if Liberals come to see the proposal as endangering constitutional peace.”

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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