



Election Notebook: Poll fever

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Polls and more polls. The Ontario election is exactly five weeks away, the polls are rolling in and they are showing a trend. Now, hold off on those tweets and calls, and please spare me the favourite line from all partisans: "The only poll that counts is the one on election day."

Well maybe.

However those racy headlines in the Star yesterday and the one buried in the National Post today do get voters thinking. Today's poll comes from Forum Research and the headline writers chose "McGuinty, Hudak race 'neck and neck.'"

So what do the numbers (that all the party's say they're ignoring) tell us? This race is getting closer by the day.

The Progressive Conservatives are still ahead with 35 per cent of the support but the Liberals are now at 30 per cent and the NDP have climbed to 26 per cent. It is worth pointing out that today's numbers are similar to the Angus Reid numbers (PCs 38 per cent and Liberals 31 per cent) reported yesterday in the Star, only today it's a couple of points closer. (Both polls have a margin of error of about 3 per cent)

Lorne Bozinoff, the president of Forum Research, told me this morning that it was only two months ago that Dalton McGuinty trailed far behind PC leader Tim Hudak. Today's poll had the two tied when voters were asked to decide on who would be the best premier of Ontario. Bozinoff says "the election is up for grabs."

Bozinoff made two other interesting observations. Support for the NDP is growing. Bozinoff says the NDP has been gaining a couple of points a month and that 26 per cent puts the party within striking distance. Bozinoff says, "the NDP has the most room to grow." He points out the NDP leader Andrea Horwath is still unknown and if she has a strong campaign and a good debate performance she could still make this election a three-way race.

The Forum poll also shows the PCs are now trailing badly in the 416 Toronto ridings. Bozinoff says the PC vote "has collapsed" and if the election was held today "the PCs wouldn't win anything in the 416."

The Liberal Party is still playing cute on when its platform will be released. Seems like it wont be today or tomorrow but I'm still being told it will be before the writ is issued next Wednesday.

Somehow a release in the middle of a holiday weekend seems unlikely to me so that leaves Monday or Tuesday. And what will it say? All I am being told is that the platform has been carefully put together and Campaign Chair Greg Sorbara says the theme will be "serious plans for serious times."

Today's PC event was billed as an announcement about "relief for families." Since it was around the corner from work I took it in. A handful of reporters, outnumbered by cameras about two to one, listened as PC leader Tim Hudak attacked the McGuinty government for its "sneaky tax grabs." This evening Hudak will be in his riding to kick off his own re-election campaign.

Yet again, Premier McGuinty has no public appearances today but the party did make another education announcement. It is promising a voluntary two-week summer school program for young students struggling with basic skills.

The NDP's Andrea Horwath has no events planned either. This morning the NDP released its first TV ad for the campaign. <http://ontariondp.com/en/andrea-horwath-the-change-ontario-needs-now> Andrea Horwath is the focus of the ad and she uses that "change" word but puts the emphasis on the "kind of change" that is needed. The only promise in the ad is to "take the HST off essentials" The NDP says the ad will start running on TV next week.