

Visit **OLAY FOR YOU** [OlayForYou.ca](http://OlayForYou.ca) to receive your personal skin care routine today.  
**Start Your Virtual Consultation**

**THE HILL TIMES**  
 POLICY BRIEFINGS

**THE HILL TIMES**

Since 1989

CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSWEEKLY

October 6, 2008

**GTEC 2008**

Search   Advanced Options

- ▶ SUBSCRIPTIONS
- ▶ ADVERTISING
- ▶ ABOUT HT
- ▶ CONTACT
- ▶ CAREERS

**PUBLIC SECTION**

- Cover Stories
- Policy Briefings
- Letters
- Classifieds
- Vacation
- Links
- Home Page

**MEMBERS SECTION**

- Login
- Weekly PDFs
- Archives
- Surveys
- Lists
- FAQ

**NEWS**

- News Stories
- Heard on the Hill
- Legislative Column
- Hill Climbers
- Civil Circles

**Autumn Leaves Arts Tour**  
 Oct 4 & 5 and Oct 11, 12, & 13  
[www.tiarts.org](http://www.tiarts.org)  
 613 923 1857

**OPINIONS**

- Editorial
- Op-eds
- Letters

**COLUMNISTS**

- Andrew Cardozo
- Richard Cl  roux
- Jenefer Curtis
- Aaron Freeman
- Philippe Gagnon
- Chantal H  bert
- David Jones
- Joe Jordan
- Warren Kinsella
- Tom Korski
- Brad Lavigne
- Don Lenihan
- Denis Massicotte
- Arthur Milnes
- Angelo Persichilli
- Tim Powers
- Ken Rubin
- Mike Storeshaw
- Leslie Swartman
- James Travers

**FEATURES**

- Policy Briefings
- Spin Doctors
- Parliamentary Calendar

The Hill Times, October 6th, 2008  
**NEWS STORY**  
 By Bea Vongdouangchanh and Abbas Rana

# Prime Minister Harper visits mostly unheld ridings in bid to win power

**Stephen Harper's tour is 'effectively a marketing vehicle' for the party's local candidates.**

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has visited approximately 36 federal ridings over the last four weeks of the election campaign, but only three held by the Conservatives, in an effort to shore up support in key ridings they believe they can win in next week's election.

"Every little bit counts," said Innovative Research pollster Greg Lyle. "You're trying to show you care by being there. 'You're on my radar screen, I'm paying attention to you,' and we all like the Prime Minister paying attention to us, so it won't hurt. If they sent the Prime Minister there, they've also probably sent their top organizers and [other resources]. That's going to make the real difference for them."

Mr. Harper has visited only three Conservative-held ridings to date: Diane Ablonczy's (Calgary-Nose Hill, Alta.), Maurice Vellacott's (Saskatoon-Wanuskewin, Sask.), and Pierre Lemieux's (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Ont.).

Conservative strategist Tim Powers, vice-president of consulting firm Summa Strategies, agreed that the Prime Minister's cross-country tour has made stops in ridings where he believes "gains can be made." Mr. Powers said the leader's tour is "effectively a marketing vehicle" for the party's local candidates. "Wherever it goes, it's about reaping rewards. If the seat is unheld, well the intention of the leader going there is to try to get that seat. If the seat is held, it's the intention to protect it," he said.

In close ridings, Mr. Lyle said that in addition to the PM's visit, the Tories would most likely be organizing follow up visits by senior Cabinet ministers, top organizers and sending in more resources.

Mr. Lyle said that a number of factors play a key role in winning close ridings. For example, he pointed out national and regional trends, local candidates, riding organizations, planning and resources. He added that one of the trends that he's observing is that the Harper Tories have a negative trend in Quebec and a positive trend in rest of Canada.

Greg Morrow, a former faculty member at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who specializes in the intersection of politics and urban space and currently runs the DemocraticSpace.com website, said he believes that the Tories will form the next government but also said it is still a question of whether it would be a majority or a minority government. He said the key to the Conservatives' victory is rural ridings in Quebec. Mr. Harper has visited nine Quebec ridings, eight of which are "rural," but Mr. Morrow said the Conservatives' support is declining there.

"A week ago, that was close. You saw the Conservatives and the Bloc sort of racing against one another in Quebec. They were basically tied around 30 per cent, but since then, you've seen the Bloc go up five and the Conservatives down five and that puts the Conservative majority in serious doubt," Mr. Morrow said. "In terms of the Conservative targeting, things like London, where they could win, they're definitely going to be targeting

**Clarendon Lanes**  
 MARKET LIVING

**VERTICA**  
 REALTY SERVICES

**SPIN DOCTORS**  
  
 Brad Lavigne  
 ◀ PREVIOUS      NEXT ▶

**GTEC 2008**  
 CANADA'S GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY EVENT  
 OCTOBER 27 - 30  
 WESTIN HOTEL  
 OTTAWA, CANADA

Make the shift to **Government 2.0**



**Register Today!**  
 Register now online or by phone, fax or mail  
 MORE INFORMATION ▶  
 GTEC.CA

that. They're going to be targeting certain ridings in the 905 area, and they'll win a certain degree of those, but the real key to them getting a majority is in rural Quebec."

Mr. Lyle said that the Tories have an edge over the other parties in planning and allocating resources in closely-held ridings.

"As far as the level of riding organization is concerned, on an average seat, the Tories are going to be way ahead of the Liberals because that's a combination of plans and money and the Tories have more of those," he said. "They've got plans to make a real difference in the seats and they've got the money to make a real difference in these seats and the Liberals don't. In a seat that's a 50-50 seat, most of those seats are going to go Tory. They're not going to break 50-50, they're going to break, 70-30 or 80-20."

Mr. Lyle said that the economy has emerged as one of the key factors that will most likely determine the outcome of the next federal election and this is good news for Mr. Harper.

"The fact that the U.S. financial crisis continues to be prolonged is very good for the Tories because people's assumption is a tough minded economist like Stephen Harper is probably a good guy to have in that job in these tough times. That's very good for Stephen Harper in terms of maintaining the trend in these seats."

Meanwhile, in not-for-attribution-based interviews last week, some Liberal sources said they're interpreting the Prime Minister's visits to some 15 Ontario ridings in a number of ways. The Liberal sources explained that in some of the cases, Tories are scheduling the PM's visits in ridings where they can win but in some ridings such as London-Fanshawe, Ont., which is currently held by NDP MP Irene Mathysen, they know they can't win but want to boost their party's vote to ensure that the Liberals don't win and the NDP carries those ridings.

"I think they are doing that in a lot of ridings," said one Ontario Liberal source. "There's no direct coalition but it's in Jack Layton's interest to defeat [Liberal leader Stéphane] Dion and it's in Harper's interest to do the same thing. They do everything strategically."

Prime Minister Harper visited Scarborough Southwest, Ont., currently held by retiring Liberal MP Tom Wappel, early in the campaign. The source said that Tories are targeting that riding because Mr. Wappel, who has represented the riding since 1988 and is not running again, was considered right wing so they believe they have a good shot at winning there.

Tories won the riding of Halton, Ont., with Garth Turner as their candidate who switched sides to the Liberals, so the Harper Conservatives think that they can win that riding again as Mr. Turner is now a member of the Liberal caucus.

The province of British Columbia has been a battleground since the 2006 election, where there are some three-way races between the Conservatives, Liberals, and NDP. Mr. Harper has visited four Vancouver-area ridings, but it's still hard to tell how successful the Conservatives will be there, Mr. Powers said.

"I think Dion's been hurt out there as he has been in other parts of the country by his carbon tax. You've seen the backlash from British Columbia from Premier [Gordon] Campbell's own carbon tax. That didn't help Dion there at all," Mr. Powers said. "I think both ourselves and the NDP can cut in there, and also because if the economy is a central issue of the campaign, which we think it is, we think we have a better approach to Mr. Dion than a 30 day plan of meetings that's been cooked up in the last moment. It's tough, but you never underestimate your competition. I think the voters will decide, but certainly I think frustration with the carbon tax provides opportunities for ourselves and the NDP."

Over on the east coast, where the Prime Minister has visited a number of ridings in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, Mr. Powers said the party will also have a lot of work to do. He said Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams' "Anything but Conservative" campaign has had some impact on the Conservative support. "I think we're going to have some trouble there," Mr. Powers said. "Newfoundland's tough ... but I think Newfoundlanders at the end of day will decide to make choices about who best can serve them in government."

Mr. Powers noted there are signs of "opportunities" in the other Atlantic provinces, even though P.E.I. has been Liberal for 20 years and the Halifax riding Mr. Harper visited has also not had a Conservative MP since 1988. "If there are changes in Atlantic Canada, again, and they are Conservative gains, I think it will have a lot to do with the work of the leadership team, but also the challenges that the Liberals have with the carbon tax there, because most of the concerns that have come forward to Mr. Dion have been from Atlantic MPs about the carbon tax," Mr. Powers said, noting all the seats would be important in securing a government, majority or minority.

"In a tough fight, they're all important. I don't mean that as a simple cliché, but it's obvious and the Prime Minister said it since day one, a minority government is the most likely



outcome and these are seat by seat fights," Mr. Powers said.

*news@hilltimes.com*

*The Hill Times*

---

© Copyright 2008 Hill Times Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited. Privacy Policy