



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Oak Ridges Markham Conservative candidate Bob Callow gets ready to hit the campaign trail as volunteers break out election signs. Like many candidates in the upcoming campaign, Mr. Callow ran in the last federal election. The slate in Oak Ridge-Markham is identical to 17 months ago.

Taking guesswork out of election call

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Forget about this federal election — there's nothing you can do about it now.

But the next time you go to the polls, there may be no guessing involved. It could be as simple as circling a date on your calendar that has already been set in stone.

Aurora-Newmarket MP Belinda Stronach, minister responsible for democratic renewal, hopes to go to Canadians in a series of public consultations to see if they prefer set election dates. That is, if her Liberal party wins this election.

"We will hear about a range of issues," Ms Stronach said. "We want to see what the people think. It's not to be made up of so-called experts."

Last year, an Environics Research Group reported 81 per cent of Canadians preferred elections be held at specific and fixed times, instead of whenever the party in power wants to call it.

However, there's some question whether a set election date would work in a minority government situation, especially with a non-confidence vote. So Canadians could still be heading into this winter election, even if a set date had been in place.

In fact, Ontario's set date legislation, which will see voters head to the polls Oct. 4, 2007, does not prevent elections from being called in a minority situation.

Still, there appears to be support for fixed election dates, even among Ms Stronach's political opponents.

Fixed election dates limit a government's ability to tailor the politi-



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Markham's Heather Gaitan is familiar with fixed election dates from her time living in Massachusetts and says they cause campaigns to drag on.

cal calendar to its partisan interests, some suggest.

Having a fixed election date, takes "all the uncertainty out" of the issue, Oak Ridges-Markham Conservative candidate Bob Callow said. "It shouldn't always be at the whim of the party (in power). Your political stripe shouldn't matter. We do it at the municipal level. It also allows people to set their schedules."

It's not the first time fixed election dates have been discussed, York University political science professor

Robert Drummond stressed.

"This is a question that comes up from time to time," Mr. Drummond said. "It removes from government the flexibility to determine what they have in relationship to when to call the election. It is a fairer system."

However, an American living in Markham doesn't recommend Canada follow the United States in establishing fix election dates.

"It's better to stick with the devil you know," Heather Gaitan, formerly of Massachusetts, said.

"The way elections are held in Canada has its advantages," Mrs. Gaitan said. "Campaigns are shorter in Canada. U.S. presidential election campaigns go on and on. They can last up to a year. You're not going to get a better election by having a fixed date."

The federal government would be following other jurisdictions if it adopted set election dates, including Ontario and British Columbia, which had its first election under the new rules last May.

Candidates strapping on snowshoes?

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Promising to be long, cold and nasty, the "snowshoe" election campaign is in full swing in York Region.

When the government fell Monday night and an election was called Tuesday, six of York Region's seven ridings were held by Liberals. Peter Van Loan from York Simcoe is the only MP holding a Conservative seat in the region.

In the past election, the Liberals carved out decisive victories of between 10,000 and 20,000 votes in the five York Region ridings they captured.

Eyes across Canada are expected to be on Newmarket-Aurora where, Belinda Stronach crossed the floor from the Conservative Party of Canada to the Liberals.

A few parties have yet to nominate candidates in local ridings. Here's how the races are shaping up:

OAK RIDGES-MARKHAM

- Incumbent: Lui Temelkovski, Liberal
- Conservative: Bob Callow
- NDP: Pamela Courtot
- Green: Bernadette Manning



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