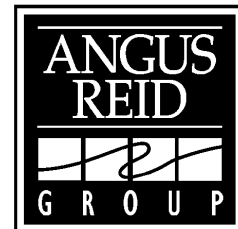

–THE ONTARIO POLITICAL SCENE –

**– ICE STORMED EASTERN ONTARIO AND THE NORTH CHILL TORY
VOTE TO LOWEST SINCE ELECTION –**

**– SENIORS HIT TORIES HARD AS HEALTHCARE ISSUES PUT BACK
ON FRONT BURNER –**

**– DESPITE LOW INTENDED VOTE AND HEALTHCARE CONCERNS,
HALF (51%) APPROVE OF OVERALL PERFORMANCE –**

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This Globe and Mail/Angus Reid Poll was conducted by telephone between February 6th and 10th, 1998 among a representative cross-section of 1,001 Ontario adults.

These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Ontario population according to the 1996 Census data.

With a province-wide sample of 1,001, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within +3.1 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult Ontario population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

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Ice storm ravaged eastern Ontario and the north have driven the Harris Conservatives' popular support to 33 percent, 13 points behind the Liberals and the lowest level of support recorded for the Tories since their election two and a half years ago. Further, it would appear that healthcare issues are back on top (having been supplanted between October and December 1997 by the education issues) of the list of both concerns and what is driving voter disapproval – this, despite the fact that half (51%) of Ontario's electorate approve of the Harris government's overall performance. These are the key findings of the latest province-wide Globe and Mail/Angus Reid Poll conducted between February 6th and 10th, 1998 among a representative cross-section of 1,001 Ontario voters.

The poll highlights include:

The Party Standings

- ◆ The PCs are now holding 33 percent of the decided vote against 46 percent for the Liberals, 14 percent for the New Democrats and 7 percent for all other parties combined. (A total of 9% were undecided/refused to say, 14% before a follow-up leaning question.) (Table 1)
- ◆ This is the lowest support level the Angus Reid Group has found for the Harris Conservatives this mandate. It represents a 5-point slip since just before Christmas,

is 14 points back from their position a year ago, and 12 points below their share of the popular vote in the June 1995 election. This is also the high mark for Dalton McGuinty's Liberals who are up 3 points over December, 10 points over last summer, 12 over last January and fully 15 points over their 31 percent share of the vote on election day. The NDP's support has been fairly stable for most of this mandate (they lost ground from their 21% share of the vote shortly after the election). (Table 2)

- ◆ On a comparative basis, it is interesting to note where the governing Tories are relative to the previous NDP government at the same time in their mandate. In July of 1993, the NDP were at 21%, having plummeted from vote intention of 64% in late 1990.
- ◆ It would appear that since the last sounding of public opinion in December, the Liberals have opened up a large lead in eastern Ontario; what was a dead heat with the Liberals and Tories both at 39% (and the NDP at 13%), is now 48% for the Liberals, 29% for the PCs and 16% for the NDP – a 19% lead for the Liberals. Further, the Liberals have opened up a 26 point lead in the north over the Tories – what was a 34% Tory vote in December is now 24%, with the Liberals up 1 point from 49% to 50% and the NDP is static at 16%. Nine percent said that they would vote for “some other party”. (Table 3)
- ◆ The Tories' recent losses have also been experienced among Ontario voters from all walks of life, but are especially dramatic among older voters (down 17 points to 33% since December to erase a Tory lead with this group) and among lower income voters (down 10 points to 16% from already weak support with this group). (Table 1)
- ◆ There continue to be powerful differences in the parties' support among different segments of the electorate. Men and more affluent voters continue to represent key Conservative constituencies – among both of these groups, these latest poll results show a statistical tie between the PCs and Liberals. The Liberals' overall lead is due to their massive two-to-one lead among women (51% vs only 24% for the PCs), and among lower income voters (49% vs 16% vs 21% for the NDP). The party standings

within the major regional groupings (GTA and elsewhere) show results very similar to the overall picture, as do the standings across age groupings and among the large middle income group. (Table 1)

- ◆ When asked what the most important issues are facing Ontario's leaders, healthcare has jumped into first place (49%), up 21% since December, followed then by education and schools at 40% (down 15%), jobs and unemployment at 33% (up one percent), poverty at 13%, the deficit at 12%, social services at 10% and taxes at 10%. Those most concerned about healthcare are seniors (59%) – more than any other demographic group. It is important to note that between October and December 1997, the healthcare issue was supplanted by education concerns and the teachers' strike – in October, education was the number one issue at 61% and healthcare ranked second at 43%; in December, the top issue was education at 55% and healthcare at 28%. Prior to October, the healthcare issue was at the top of Ontarians' concerns in August at 50%. (Tables 4 and 5)
- ◆ The government's approval ratings hold better news for the Harris Conservatives: the Ontario voters surveyed in early February narrowly approved of this provincial government's overall performance (51% vs 45% disapproval). (Table 6)
- ◆ When asked why respondents "approved or disapproved of the government's performance", the main reasons were as follows: "approve", "reducing the debt" (26%) and "sticking to their promises" (25%); "disapprove", "cuts to healthcare" (28%) and "cuts to education" (23%). Those most likely to deplore the cuts to healthcare are seniors (34%). (Table 7)

The Party Leaders

- ◆ Premier Mike Harris himself enjoys a fairly solid approval rating with an overall split verdict: 49 percent approved of his performance, 49 percent disapproved. Again, it is women and lower income voters who are least impressed with this Premier (58% and 67% disapproval respectively). (Table 8)
- ◆ Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty is still an unknown quantity for 40 percent of

voters, although those with an opinion tend to be impressed (39% vs 21%). (Table 8)

- ◆ NDP leader Howard Hampton is lesser known still (52% didn't rate his performance), and receives a divided assessment from those with a view (25% approve, 23% disapprove). (Table 8)

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