

# Conservatives prepare for 'nasty' campaign [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The Tories won't be "boy scouts" as they fight back against Liberal attacks in what the party expects to be a nasty federal campaign, Conservative Leader Stephen Harper said Friday.

"It's bound to be a nasty campaign," Mr. Harper said during a visit to Toronto to outline the Tory proposal for a new tax break for retirement income.

Prime Minister Paul Martin is expected to call an election May 23 for a June 28 vote.

The Liberal party is expected to strike first with a series of attack-style TV ads early next week aimed at demonizing Mr. Harper. The ads will feature Mr. Harper's own words on sticky issues such as immigration.

The Liberals will try to brand Mr. Harper as a right-wing extremist who is unappealing to voters outside his Western base.

Mr. Harper also tried to quash criticism Friday that his party is suffering from a "gender gap," a perception the party is run by "knuckle-dragging" Neanderthals resulting in weak support from women and minorities.

"Just to quote that longtime Toronto Star columnist Dalton Camp, who long ago said that I was the Alliance member least likely to drag his knuckles," Mr. Harper quipped, after an address at the C.D. Howe Institute. Mr. Camp, who also worked as a Tory strategist, died in 2002.

"On another occasion . . . he said that I was the 'thinking man's redneck' - which I'm so proud of, I promised my wife I'm going to have that on my tombstone."

"Let's have some realistic fears," he added. "Women's voting rights aren't going to be stripped away or whatever the allegations are."

Among the "real choices" he said the merged Conservative and Alliance party will offer Canadians is a proposed Registered Lifetime Savings Plan, or RLSP, to complement the 47-year-old Registered Retirement Savings Plan.

Mr. Harper says he plans to use a federal surplus, which he estimates will balloon to \$90 billion within five years, to slash taxes for both individuals and businesses.

The Conservatives would also provide tax breaks for Canadians with children instead of boosting spending on day care, Mr. Harper says, and federal gas taxes would be cut through provincial agreements.

- reprinted from the Canadian Press

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