

Bid to sway a single undecided voter

20 per cent of Quebecers have yet to settle on their political allegiance, poll says

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

In a bid to garner support in Quebec, Green Party leader Jim Harris yesterday pitched his pro-environment tune to one of the undecided voters that The Gazette has been following throughout this election campaign.

"Quebec youth have said, 'Enough about sovereignty ... we want to talk about environment,'" Harris told Célestin Bouchard, who oscillates between the Bloc Québécois and the Greens. "Will we wait for every child to have asthma before doing something?"

The politician made these comments in French, as he tried to sway the 30-year-old singer-songwriter during a one-hour visit to Bouchard's home in Hochelaga neighbourhood.

But despite the attention he received from the six Green Party members and two television crews who swarmed his house, Bouchard remained skeptical.

"I want to believe in your party," Bouchard told Harris. "But I don't know all the details. I tried to go see on the Web, but I didn't find information on the candidates.

"I am still undecided," Bouchard later told a reporter.

He is not alone. According to a CPAC-SES poll made public yesterday, 20 per cent of Quebec voters had yet to settle on their political allegiance. This is precisely the pool of voters Harris had hoped to tap into by talking to Bouchard at home under the TV camera lights, the leader said.

"Undecided voters are really the key," Harris told reporters. "We've never seen as fluid an

election in the history of Canada. ... This is the perfect storm for the Green Party to have its breakthrough."

Only yesterday, Harris's job was no easy sail. After serving the party leader a mint and verbena tea, Bouchard grilled Harris on his ability to keep his promises, given the party's inexperience on the political scene.

"I'm questioning myself on the solidity of your party," Bouchard said. "Do you think you will be able to garner enough influence across Canada to (effect change) on the issue of the environment?"

In the 2004 election, the Greens got no members of Parliament elected, but they did get 108,000 votes in Quebec and 500,000 votes throughout Canada, or about four per cent of the total.

Harris said that, even with one MP elected, his party would be able to implement changes in a minority government. He reiterated his commitment to entrench the right to clean air in this country's Charter of Rights.

When questioned by reporters, Harris shrugged off the fact that Sierra Club Canada yesterday named the Liberals as the party with the most environmentally aware candidates.

The Green Party came in third after the New Democratic Party.

"People trust the Green Party on the issue that we talk about," Harris responded.

Still, Bouchard wavered.

"For sure, they want development when it comes to the environment," he said. "But to what point? I don't know. I've never seen them in action."



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Jim Harris, leader of the Green Party (left), meets undecided voter Célestin Bouchard at his home in Montreal's east end yesterday.