



Harper Takes Credit for Federalist Victory in Quebec Election

By Theophilos Argitis

March 27 (Bloomberg) -- Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said the biggest electoral defeat for Quebec separatists in almost 40 years yesterday reflects his government's efforts to give more power and resources to provinces.

Popular support for the Parti Quebecois, which has waged a four-decade struggle to win the province's independence, fell below 30 percent for the first time since 1970. While Quebec Liberal Party Premier Jean Charest lost seats, he'll lead a minority government. The Action Democratique du Quebec, a rival federalist party, will serve as official opposition.

``We're very encouraged to see that we have a government that is opposed to having another referendum, and we have an official opposition that is opposed to having another referendum," Harper told reporters today in Ottawa. ``It's good news for this government, but it's also good news for Quebec and Canada."

Harper's own minority Conservative Party government faces elections as early as this year, and needs to increase its count of 10 Quebec seats to win a majority. The government raised transfers to Quebec by C\$2.3 billion for the coming fiscal year in a budget announced during the provincial campaign. Harper also won passage last year of a motion recognizing Quebec as a nation within Canada, and has pledged to reduce federal interference in provincial affairs.

He said he won't seek to use the vote in Quebec to proceed with federal elections.

``I know everybody sees election opportunities in this, but the public didn't elect me to sit around looking for election opportunities," Harper said.

Harper faces a vote of confidence today when his budget comes up for lawmakers' approval.

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