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June 14, 2010

David Rider

Councillor Rob Ford says wasteful city spending is the fuel that has propelled him into a tie for first place in the Toronto mayoral race.

Reacting to two opinion polls made public Sunday that have him neck-and-neck with former Ontario health minister George Smitherman, the Etobicoke councillor said he's not taking anything for granted but his support is building with Torontonians' exasperation over misuse of their tax dollars.

"It's a simple message but I hear it over and over — people are fed up with the spending, the sense of entitlement and the greed," Ford said Monday, adding the surveys might have been affected by his campaign to pressure Councillor Kyle Rae to pay back money for a farewell party he threw himself.

A week ago, Rae (Toronto Centre-Rosedale) threw a party, to mark his retirement from politics, at the posh Rosewater Supper Club that he estimates will take a \$12,000 bite out of his 2010 council office budget.

Rae has said the cost is more than offset by unused campaign contributions he turned over to the city in 2006, and his decision not to put out a newsletter, but Ford has launched a website, raemustpay.com, and plans to raise the issue at council.

A [Forum Research Inc. poll](#) of 405 Torontonians conducted from Friday to Sunday found that, among decided voters, 29 per cent said they would vote for Smitherman compared to 26 for Ford.

A [Globeandmail/CTV/CP24/Nanos poll](#) of 1,000 Torontonians conducted from last Monday to Friday, had Ford in the lead, 17.8 per cent to 15.9 per cent. Those figures include undecided voters.

For both polls, the gap between Ford and Smitherman is within the margin of error.

But when Forum offered respondents a slate that added John Tory, a centre-right conservative who announced in January he wouldn't run, 38 per cent said they would vote for Tory. The CFRB radio host and voluntary chair of the Toronto City Summit Alliance would steal the most votes from Ford, who would sink into fourth place.

Tory said Monday he still has no plans to run but he repeated his earlier "never-say-never" statement.

"In politics I don't think you ever, no matter who you are, what meeting or what level of government or what election you're talking about, to say 'never' is something I think is unwise," he told reporters at the Toronto Board of Trade.

"But as of that moment I've said I have no plans to be a candidate," said Tory.

Ford, who had planned to support Tory's candidacy, shrugged off the poll result and an ongoing campaign by some other Tory supporters to get his friend on the ballot.

"I like John and wish him well whatever he decides but I can't worry about him," Ford said. "I have to stay focused on Rob Ford. Whatever happens, mark my words, I will be on the ballot Oct. 25."

Ford said he wouldn't allow his anti-spending platform to be derailed by critics who suggest he can't win the election without a plan for transit.



Rob Ford stands alone during a media scrum following a May debate. Current polls show him running neck and neck with George Smitherman, far right, but suggest he would fall back in the pack if John Tory entered the race.

RENE JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

"Transportation's very important and I do have a transportation plan but the number one issue for people is the spending," he said.

The other big winner in the Forum survey is Sarah Thomson, until recently a political unknown who polled third, though well behind Ford, at 17 per cent. She was ahead of Deputy Mayor Joe Pantalone at 12 per cent, Rocco Rossi at 10, and Giorgio Mammoliti at 4.

"I think it's great, I think it reflects that people want change," said Thomson, who is pushing for subway expansion potentially funded through road tolls and more outsourcing of city services.

That's in line with an Environics poll that closed May 8. However, last week's Nanos poll had Thomson in fifth place among decided voters.

Rossi said he wasn't surprised or discouraged by the latest poll results.

"It's exactly what I'm hearing at the door. People are frustrated, people are angry. But you also have 40 per cent of voters undecided. They don't just want to be angry," he said.

"The race is tighter than it's been. We had talk at the beginning that this was all over, it was George Smitherman's to lose. He's doing a pretty good of tightening up the race. When we started we were almost 30 points out of first place, now we're 15 points out of first place with half of the election still to go. (I) love our chances."