Geography plays key role in results

Dinning takes Calgary, south goes to Morton

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Jim Dinning swept almost all of the Calgary polls, and Ted Morton dominated rural southern Alberta, but Edmonton and northern Alberta turned up a hodgepodge of results.

The first ballot of the Alberta Progressive Conservative party leadership race showed geography definitely does matter, and each of the three remaining candidates have enough support to ensure that the competition to decide who becomes the next premier of the province is far from over.

"Who can argue with democracy?" said Peter Elzinga, executive director of the party. "Jim Dinning's major support is in Calgary, which is natural.

"But he had good support throughout the province. Ted Morton also had good support throughout the province, as did Ed Stelmach."

Elzinga said the turnout throws cold water on the theory that people are disinterested in the leadership race.

"Everyone was saying that there was going to be such a poor turnout, and we had close to double the number of people voting in this race than what we had in 1992."

While some candidates and party members have indicated that 40 per cent of the 97,690 ballots cast resulted from party memberships purchased at the polling stations instead of being bought in advance, Elzinga believes that figure is closer to 20-25 per cent.

He said no hard figures are yet available for day-of-voting membership sales.

"It just shows the openness of our party," Elzinga said, noting that other parties force members to register to vote far in advance.

Party members voted at 179 locations across the province. Of all the votes, 27 per cent were cast in Calgary, and 21 per cent in Edmonton. Voters living in areas outside of Alberta's two major cities came out in force, casting 52 per cent of ballots.

Dinning captured 29,470 votes, Morton 25,614 and Stelmach 14,967.

In Calgary, Dinning won 22 of 23 city ridings — many by a wide margin. He showed strength in ridings such as Calgary-Elbow — the riding in which Dinning lives and where his organization was led by longtime party insider Gord Olsen — and Calgary West, where Dinning had strong support from ally and MLA Ron Liepert.