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A chance at redemption

EDITORIAL

Well, it would appear we are back to square one as far as the Conservative Party of Canada is concerned here in Dufferin-Caledon.

The Party's Executive Director Dustin Van Vugt announced last Thursday that a brand new nomination process would be held in the local riding to determine retiring MP David Tilson's Tory replacement. It's news that hasn't exactly been well received, with many, not least candidate Kevin Weatherbee, taking aim at head office for, as some have claimed, jeopardizing what has long been been considered a safe seat for the Conservatives here in Dufferin-Caledon.

To be fair, one can hardly blame the party for wanting to wash their hands of and completely forget and eradicate the previous nomination, which concluded with a highly contentious vote back on March 19. It was a nightmare. A worst-case scenario for a party hoping to take advantage of some late-term controversies and oust Prime Minister Justin Trudeau from office in October's federal election.

In a way, it is surprising the Party has gotten away relatively scot-free with what has happened here in Dufferin-Caledon. Outside of the coverage provided by local media, there has been very little attention paid to what has grown to become a significant problem for the party.

While it is easy to lay the blame solely at the feet of Harzadan Khattra for what happened during the previous nomination process, the truth is there were several other issues beyond any of the candidates' control that night. Reports of legitimate voters being turned away, despite providing proof of their prior purchasing of a membership has stained the Party's reputation locally. That so many individuals were, clearly, able to abuse the system without being caught ahead of time has only served to magnify those issues.

So what can the Party do differently this time around to ensure the process is fair and equal for all candidates? The local board was informed this week that an audit was currently being conducted to verify the Dufferin-Caledon membership list. At least the Party's head office is giving the impression that they're committed to making sure things are done properly this time around.

It was telling, however, last week when Derek Clark, the chair of the nomination committee during the previous process, resigned from that position in the wake of the announcement of a new nomination. He had previously informed the Citizen that he would advise the Party against holding another meeting here in Dufferin-Caledon. There just isn't enough time, were his words.

That was all the way back in April. Before the Green Party had a confirmed candidate. Before the People's Party had a confirmed candidate. Before the Liberal Party had a confirmed candidate. While, at one point, it appeared a potential Conservative candidate would have a significant head start in Dufferin-Caledon, it's clear now that whoever comes out on top in this new nomination will be starting behind the eight ball. Even in a riding that has, traditionally, been a Tory stronghold, that's a dangerous position to be in. Especially with the controversy of the past three months continuing to hang over the party like a dark cloud.

While the Party has hinted towards a need to be more open and transparent as a reason for reopening the nomination process, it has been suggested it has more to do with head office having a distinct lack of confidence in the three remaining nominees, some of whom have dedicated the better part of a year towards their campaign. To us, were that to be the case, it would be nothing but a great shame.

Regardless, the Conservatives now have a chance at redemption here in Dufferin-Caledon. A new meeting will be scheduled on, or before, Aug. 6, according to the local board. We'll be observing with a keen eye to see if the process is any better this time around.