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Kevin Weatherbee withdraws from D-C nomination race

Written By MIKE BAKER

There was another dramatic twist in the seemingly never-ending saga surrounding the Dufferin-Caledon Conservative nomination last week after Kevin Weatherbee, the runner-up in the original vote held back in March and a perceived front runner again this time around, announced he is removing himself from consideration.

In a release to local Conservative Party members, Mr. Weatherbee noted he had come to the ?immensely difficult decision? not to run during this second process due to several concerns he has with the new nomination, which the Citizen can confirm has been scheduled for July 31.

Reflecting on the past three months, Mr. Weatherbee maintained his belief that he is the ?rightful winner? of the original nomination vote, where he received 468 votes from local Conservative members.

?Three months ago our party held a nomination race so that we, the local members of the Conservative Party in Dufferin-Caledon, could select our candidate for the upcoming fall federal election,? Mr. Weatherbee wrote. ?Despite Ottawa party officials deciding to schedule the vote right up against the March Break holiday, over 1,500 members came out and voted? I was extremely proud and humbled by the significant number of members who came out to support me personally in the race.?

While the announced winner on the night, Harzadan Singh Khattra, was later disqualified by the National Candidate Selection Committee, Mr. Weatherbee has maintained the original nomination, ran and controlled by the Conservative's head office, should be respected and the ?will of the voters? honoured.

?Dufferin-Caledon members voted in an election that the central party organized, planned, oversaw and directed. Though Harzadan Khattra received the most votes on March 19, Barb Shaughnessy appealed the result to the party. Based on the contents of Barb Shaughnessy's appeal, the party chose to disqualify Harzadan Khattra without any elaboration as to why,? Mr. Weatherbee stated.

He added, ?Since Harzadan Khattra was no longer eligible to be the candidate, of the three remaining eligible candidates I had the most votes, and thus I should by all rights be our party's candidate.?

Following 49 days of silence, Conservative Party of Canada Executive Director Dustin Van Vugt announced, back on June 13, that a new nomination would take place in Dufferin-Caledon. It was a move that caught most in the local riding off guard, with many expecting the Party to award the nomination to Mr. Weatherbee.

At a local board meeting held at Innis Glen Farm on June 17, Dave Dillon, Conservative Regional Organizer for Southwestern Ontario, confirmed the nomination would be open to new nominees, while those involved in the previous process would have to be reapproved should they wish to run again.

Barb Shaughnessy and Jeremy Williams have both confirmed to the Citizen they plan to seek the nomination once again, while Kyle Seeback, a former one-term Brampton MP, has declared his intentions to run in what he calls his home riding.

Mr. Seeback, who also holds a seat on the Dufferin-Caledon Conservative Association board, was present at last week's meeting at Innis Glen Farm. There, Mr. Seeback was involved in several votes relating to the scheduling of a new AGM and the formation of a new nomination committee. It was determined, by Mr. Dillon, that since Mr. Seeback was not yet a confirmed candidate, he wasn't required to declare a conflict of interest and recuse himself from voting.

While the vote over the formation of the nomination committee was, largely, unanimous, the vote relating to scheduling a new AGM was not. Mr. Seeback's vote ensured a motion to hold a quick AGM, sometime before July 17, failed 10 to 9. The primary purpose of

the AGM is to select a new board. Eventually, the board voted in favour of holding off on scheduling the AGM until the Party has a confirmed candidate in the riding.

While Mr. Weatherbee made note of this in his withdrawal speech, he chose not to criticize Mr. Seeback, Mr. Dillon, nor the board. When speaking to the Citizen early last week, Mr. Weatherbee did, however, admit his faith in the Party under its current leadership was wavering.

?It is completely disheartening when one candidate, who didn't run before, who appears to have everything ready and seemed to know the vote was going to come, has left the rest of us at a clear disadvantage,? Mr. Weatherbee said. ?As this process has gone on, every day, more and more, I doubt the ability of the party to handle this process.?

After spending the best part of two years preparing himself and campaigning to replace retiring MP David Tilson, Mr. Weatherbee says he has come to peace with his decision to step away from the nomination. However, as a lifelong Conservative and former President of the local board, he indicated he will still be involved, in some way, here in Dufferin-Caledon.

?I will continue to volunteer and be engaged around our amazing riding, and am excited to see what the future holds,? Mr. Weatherbee said. ?I am optimistic that regardless of what our differences may be, when we join together as friends and neighbours honestly, respectfully, and in the spirit of fairness, and strive to build better communities and a better, more fair nation that respects taxpayers and focuses on delivering real results for Canadians, there's nothing we can't accomplish.?

A second Dufferin-Caledon Conservative nomination has been scheduled for July 31. The federal election will be held on Oct. 21.