

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Where does the PC Party of Ontario go from here?

By Stephen Somerville

I know that it is a gross understatement to suggest that a lot has transpired over the past few weeks in the life of the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party of Ontario.

As someone who has been a volunteer member of the PC Party for the last 34 years and knows a number of the main characters in this drama, it has been tough watching the events play out as they did.

A lot of ink has already been spilt surrounding the saga, so I will instead concentrate on where that Party goes from here.

I believe that the Party did the right thing by calling a leadership vote among all party members. If the Party executive had voted the other way, I would not have liked it, but I would have been able to live with Interim Leader Vic Fedeli leading us into the next election.

I have had the privilege of working with Mr. Fedeli since he was first elected to Queen's Park in 2011. The successful entrepreneur and former North Bay Mayor is a great guy. He is intelligent; well-spoken and has a good sense of humour. He was an extremely capable energy and also finance critic. His 'Fedeli on Finance' e-mail newsletters are must reads for me.

In the end, the purported 200,000 members of this party have the right to elect the leader. There are those who think that we should adhere to the 32 elected MPPs unanimous support of Interim leader Vic Fedeli and not hold a leadership vote. They say that these folks are on the front lines. These MPPs do represent us well, but the very foundation of this party is its members. They should decide.

The leadership rules have now been posted. The Party will choose a Leader on March 10.

According to a number of different published reports, this is what we know:

The votes will be cast electronically between March 2 and March 8, and the results will be announced March 10.

There will be no delegated convention. Every party member has the right to vote.

Under the rules, leadership candidates must submit their paperwork and \$100,000 in fees and deposits by the February date, with another \$25,000 due later to access the party's membership list.

The document says each candidate's campaign spending cannot exceed \$750,000.

Ontario residents who wish to help select the new Tory leader must become party members by that same date.

For the purpose of apportioning ballot results among the candidates, each Electoral District shall be assigned up to 100 Electoral Votes. Upon the completion of a ballot, the votes cast in each Electoral District shall be counted. If 100 or fewer votes have been cast, each candidate shall receive Electoral Votes equal to the number of votes cast for the candidate. Otherwise, each candidate shall receive Electoral Votes equivalent to the percentage of votes cast for the candidate.

A candidate receiving more than half of the Electoral Votes province-wide is elected the Leader. On a ballot, the candidate receiving the lowest number of electoral votes and any candidate receiving less than 10% of electoral votes shall not proceed to the next ballot.

One of the key issues is what do we do with the Party's election platform, called the 'People's Guarantee'. As you may recall, back in November at the Etobicoke Congress Centre this platform was unveiled to great fanfare.

There are five key tenants to the platform: 22.5% lower income taxes for middle class, 75% refund of child care expenses, 12% further cut to hydro rates, largest commitment to mental spending in Canadian provincial history on mental health, and a Trust, Integrity and Accountability Act.

There are a large number of people in the party who don't like the carbon tax, among other election planks.

On page eight of the Leadership rules document it states, 'No person shall be a candidate unless he or she supports the aims, principles, and objectives of the Party and the policy resolutions adopted at the Constitutionally-mandated 2017 policy process, and so confirms in the prescribed form.'

Even though the Party wants each of the candidates to abide by the platform, the rules state there will be at least one debate among the candidates.

This doesn't make much sense to me.

If candidates must follow the platform, then why are we delaying the leadership vote to March?

If we aren't going to discuss policy and it is simply a beauty contest, then why not get on with it?

Why not just mail out a ballot with say 10 or 15 names on it and tell everyone that you have two weeks to mail it back in. The Party

could give each candidate the opportunity to include a glossy brochure in the package.

I have a feeling though, that someone like Doug Ford, former Toronto City Councillor and brother of former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, who has announced his intention to run, will break with his pledge and re-ignite a vociferous debate on some or all the planks of the existing platform.

I will be watching the next few weeks with great interest.

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