

Ontario facing ?most critical election? in its history: Doug Ford



By Brock Weir

It's not about a leadership race, it's about the movement.

So contends former Toronto councillor Doug Ford as bids to become the next leader of Ontario's Progressive Conservative party. Ahead of Saturday's vote tally at a leadership convention, Mr. Ford rallied local supporters Monday night in the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

He was joined at the rally by Newmarket-Aurora PC candidate Charity McGrath, who endorsed his leadership bid last week, along with a host of other candidates and dignitaries, including Councillors John Abel and Jeff Thom.

?It is not about the leadership race, it is not about this election, it is a movement,? he told PC members at Oakview Terrace. ?As we have been travelling thousands of miles, driving through the night, visiting towns, I have never seen anything like it.?

It is a movement he contends is attracting members of all parties, and even Ontarians who have never held a party affiliation. But, at the end of the day, he said it is all about a choice.

?We're either going to elect a Liberal, or we're going to elect someone who is going to respect the taxpayers, challenge and get rid of the political insiders ?and we're going to make sure we're putting money back into your pocket instead of the government,? said Mr. Ford, namesake of his late father who served as an MPP in the Harris government. ?Queen's Park is corrupt from top to bottom. We're going to sanitize Queen's Park. We're going to make sure we sanitize our own party as well; the same people who have been controlling the party for 30 years and just itching to get back in there and have the status quo.

?The status quo is unacceptable. To the millions of dollars in contracts, the hundreds of millions of dollars, it's finished. The sole source deals are done. Kathleen Wynne has absolutely zero respect for the taxpayers.?

With the crowd fired up, Mr. Ford got down to business, first taking aim at Ontario's debt, which he said Ontarians are racking up \$12 billion in interest a year. Wasted money, he said, which would come to an end if he takes the helm of the PCs and steers them to election victory. He said the blueprint to this would be following the same format set by his brother, the late Toronto mayor Rob Ford, when he came into power with himself as a council member.

?We have a very simple theory, no matter if it comes to business or if it comes to politics: I surround myself with a lot smarter people than myself in their area of expertise, whether it is healthcare, education or culture.?

Health care improvements were among the major areas Mr. Ford touched upon Monday night, relaying a story of his time spent in hospital with his ailing brother and seeing shortcomings in the system firsthand. He says Ontario's healthcare system is ?absolutely broken? despite the Province having ?the greatest doctors in the world.? The same, he said, goes for ?nurses, healthcare-givers and frontline workers? but these people are ?frustrated.?

?What we will do to reduce wait times in hospitals and make sure the system starts moving quicker, we will get more nurses to take over from the EMS to allow them to get back on the road,? he said. ?When I have travelled and cross-crossed the province and talked to tens of thousands of people, one example that stands out is Peterborough [where] there are 7,000 residents that do not have a general practitioner.?

Stating he would give doctors incentives to go to Ontario's more remote areas, he added: 'Until you talk to these people, you don't realise how desperate they are for healthcare. Whatever it takes to get doctors up there, reducing their taxes, putting in a little medical building for them where people need the help, nothing is more important than our health. Help is on the way, resources are on its way, and most importantly, we're going to listen to the people.'

Listening to the people, whether they are doctors, business owners, parents, or just voters in general was a common theme in Monday's speech.

Parents, he contended, were not listened to when Ontario developed its current sex-ed curriculum, which Mr. Ford said would be repealed in a PC government and replaced with curriculum he said would be 'age appropriate.'

'We will make sure parents are consulted, we're going to make sure teachers are consulted and the experts are consulted,' he said.

'We're going to make sure teachers are consulted and the experts are consulted. We're going to make sure it is age appropriate and we're going to start listening to families. If anyone ever said this in our party a few months ago, even mentioned the word 'sex ed' you were not allowed to run. It is a big, deep secret. I didn't have to take a focus group or an opinion poll to figure this out.'

A path forward for Ontario business was also something he said was perfectly clear.

Citing a loss of 300,000 manufacturing jobs, Mr. Ford looked to the recent corporate tax cuts of the Trump administration as a way to bring these jobs back to Ontario.

The carbon tax outlined in the PC's People's guarantee is done, and PC government under his leadership would open up the Ring of Fire, and the cap and trade system would be cut, keeping over \$450 million in Ontario.

'Charities are going to start here in Ontario - we're going to take care of the people first before we take care of anyone else,' he said, wondering aloud what would happen if people question potential backlash from the Federal Government. 'As [Justin Trudeau's] father said, 'Just watch us.' We will first negotiate hard. Secondly, we will go to the Supreme Court because personally we (Alberta Conservative leader Jason Kenney) don't think it is constitutional to force down our throats the Liberal ideology that we have been seeing throughout the Province - the indoctrination of values a lot of families don't share. But, we will challenge them. We will win, and we will have the independence to thrive again.'