

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill Liberals wait for nomination date



By Brock Weir

While Aurora Liberals living north of Wellington Street gear up to acclaim their next Federal candidate on Monday, those living south of the new Federal boundary are cooling their heels.

Few people are looking at their calendars with more expectation than Richmond Hill lawyer Mr. Cherniak was the first candidate out of the gate to declare his interest in carrying the Liberal banner for the newly-created riding, challenging confirmed Conservative candidate, and incumbent MP Costas Menegakis, in the election expected in the fall of 2015.

In between his day job, as well as doing his part looking after his infant son, who was born just three weeks ago, Mr. Cherniak has been spending his time going door-to-door, introducing himself to as many people as possible, and encouraging them to join the party.

“What I am hearing is Liberals in our riding are looking for a good candidate who is going to be able to go door-to-door and appeal to the average person,” he says. “We know now that the opponent is going to be Costas Menegakis, so it has to be someone with good business experience that can match up to him.

“I have been running my own law firm for six years now, including training articling students to be lawyers and creating jobs in the community. I have also been involved in the Liberal party for about 16 years now as a volunteer and have held various leadership roles, travelling thousands of miles across the Province to help the Liberal party even during times when things weren't as good for us since 2006.”

Going door-to-door, however, Mr. Cherniak says he gets the feeling there is significantly more optimism among residents towards the Liberal party than there was in the past couple of elections. The party is doing well in the polls, he says, but that is not something they can bank on. It is time to hit the pavement, and members are turning out excited, feeling the tools are in place to win an election.

“This time the optimism really is stronger and there is almost a sense that if we don't do it this time, when are we going to do it?” he says. “People are feeling very good, feeling very confident and they are expecting to pick up a lot of seats, certainly in York Region. During the last election, people were optimistic in York Region but in this election, there is really an expectation of winning in York Region.”

Aside from approved poll numbers, one key difference that might factor into the chances of local Liberals is a new leader in Justin Trudeau, he says. Mr. Trudeau has proven himself a "very smart and capable politician" able to gauge the mood of the nation, and engage people from coast to coast, he adds.

While the Conservatives have tried to make an election issue out of Mr. Trudeau's stance on marijuana (a position Mr. Cherniak says supports his view that pot laws "clearly aren't working?"), he sees local issues being centred on transportation and transit, particularly on Yonge Street, improving GO service, and making sure the Province has the support from the Federal government to follow through on projects they have prioritized.

Youth employment is another issue which he has heard from residents, particularly what Mr. Cherniak sees as a lack thereof.

"We have been seeing the youth unemployment rate at about double the adult unemployment rate but at the same time you have a very strong underemployment problem," he says. "In the last jobs report, you have 200,000 full-time jobs lost and 60,000 part-time jobs created. You can look at this as more jobs created, but you have to recognize that people can't live on part-time jobs and that is a problem if it is an ongoing trend in the economy, which it has been under the Conservatives."

Whenever Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill Grits get the call that a date has been set to pick their candidate, it will still likely be approximately a year before Canadians go to the polls. Until then it is anyone's guess on what issue will make residents sit up and take notice and ultimately become engaged in the federal vote.

"I know the Conservatives are trying to make marijuana the main issue, but that is not the issue I am hearing from people at the doors. I think they have misjudged it. I think the main issue in the next election is going to be about whether we want to continue with the sort of secretive, mean-spirited government we have now under Harper, versus the positive outlook that Justin Trudeau is going to be offering."