

Bernier offers 'bold, authentic' vision for Canada



By Brock Weir

Maxime Bernier is a man of principle.

One month away from a full year in the race to lead the Conservative Party of Canada, the Quebec MP, and former Cabinet minister, has had the opportunity to take his vision to Canadians from coast to coast; a vision rooted in four core principles: individual freedom, personal responsibility, respect and fairness.

'Canadians appreciate that,' Mr. Bernier told The Auroran on a campaign stop in the area on Tuesday afternoon. 'I think Conservatives in Canada are ready for bold Conservative reform. I propose abolishing corporate welfare and having a policy that would be fair for every single entrepreneur, using the money to lower taxes for every single entrepreneur. Canadians also like the idea that [of having] a government in Ottawa that respects the Constitution, not interfering in Provincial jurisdiction.'

As his platform continues to resonate with Conservative voters, Mr. Bernier says the fact that each platform plank is rooted in these four core principals is key to how he has been staying ahead a very crowded ' and increasingly headline-grabbing ' pack.

'I was [in the race] two days after Kellie Leitch and I have had time to explain our platform,' he says. 'Kellie Leitch campaigned on only one issue, so that is why we decided to get out there with strong policy announcements every few weeks. Because I am one of the frontrunners, I have more visibility now and I will carry on the same campaign. People can see [a distinction] between our campaign and other campaigns because we have a comprehensive platform based on Conservative principles; all the others have opinions on a lot of subjects, and some are only one-issue candidates. For me, it is about more than opinions on certain subjects; it is policies I want to be on the agenda of the Conservative government.'

Case in point: his pledge to lower the cost of air travel and increase options by privatizing airports, which has gained a degree of cross-party traction.

'We are the only country in the western world where the big airports are not privatized,' says Mr. Bernier, who also proposes the privatization of Canada Post. 'We must do that because they will then be able to raise money on the capital markets, they will be able to lower fees for travellers, and I want to open our doors to frontline investment in the aviation sector.'

'We don't have a lot of competition: there is Air Canada and WestJet. We need to have those low cost carriers we don't currently have in Canada. This is for Canadian consumers; I want them to be able to travel across this country, paying less than they are paying right now. We are very competitive travelling from a Canadian city to another country, but the costs of travelling inside the country are huge. That is why I propose privatization, open it to foreign investment, and that will be good for consumers.'

While Mr. Bernier says his vision for air travel will leave more money in the pockets of Canadians, so too will his plans for tax reform.

'We don't try to please special interest groups to get some votes,' he says. 'When we were in government, we did a lot of boutique tax credits to firefighters, kids who are playing hockey, and I don't think it is fair to have a policy like that to the people who are paying and are not receiving any benefits. Our platform is a fair one: we want to abolish all these boutique tax credits and lower taxes to every Canadian.'

'The firefighter will have more money in his pocket than he gets with the tax credit and the family will have more money in their

pocket. They appreciate our tax reform with a flat rate of 15 per cent for 90 per cent of Canadians earning between \$15,000 to \$100,000, and the rich will have another rate at 25 per cent.

?People are ready for these changes and they are telling me we don't have to be like the Liberals; we have to be ourselves and being a Conservative is a person who believes in individual freedom and personal responsibility.?

Mr. Bernier has been Member of Parliament for the Quebec riding of Beauce. In the Harper Government, he served as Minister of Industry from 2006 to 2007, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2007 to 2008, and Minister of Small Business & Tourism from 2011 to 2015.

?I am an authentic politician,? he concludes. ?I am doing what I have said for the past 10 years.?