

## BROCK'S BANTER: ...and the rest

**By Brock Weir**

Last week, The Auroran brought you the double-header of Conservative leadership candidates Lisa Raitt, who visited the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill on Sunday, March 19, followed by Kevin O'Leary, who made a campaign stop in Newmarket-Aurora the following evening.

We ? well, I ? was looking forward to bringing readers the insights of no less than six leadership hopefuls this week, all of whom were to descend on Newmarket-Aurora for one-night-only at a party fundraiser at Madsen's Greenhouse.

But, things did not go according to plan.

Despite being invited multiple times when five candidates were on the roster ? Andrew Scheer, Andrew Saxton, Chris Alexander, Michael Chong and Rick Peterson ? by the time Kellie Leitch was confirmed I received an email from one of the event organizers saying that they had erred and the event was not open to the media after all.

As the race to sign up as many new Conservative members ahead of the May vote closed this week, I thought it a bit perplexing as the candidates would want to cast as wide a net as possible in tapping residents of either Aurora's ridings, but the edict was firm.

Nevertheless, we can bring you what was said at the fundraiser. It wasn't anything salacious ? despite digs at the area's current Federal representatives, Justin Trudeau, Boris Yeltzin (!) and one dig at the media ? but a missed opportunity to get a platform out there to people who don't necessarily bleed blue.

### MICHAEL CHONG

The Welland-area MP was first to take the podium, noting the next party leader needs to understand the challenges of raising a family in a rapidly changing society. Residing just outside of Fergus, he outlined a number of key constituencies the party had to court in order to sweep into power, from rural voters to immigrants.

?My father was a Chinese immigrant who came to this country from Hong Kong in 1952 and my mother was a Dutch immigrant who came here in the 1960s from the Netherlands,? he said. ?I am the product of the Canadian immigration system and I am a very proud dad. I tell you that because the next leader of the Conservative party needs to have the support of immigration communities across the GTA [and across the country] that we lost in the last election.

?We need a leader who can grow the Conservative party. We will acknowledge that our party has lost two thirds of its membership in the last 12 years. For the first time this year there are more millennial voters than senior voters. We need to reel in the support of millennials and attract a new generation of Conservatives to the party.?

In order to do that, he concluded, it is important to remain fiscally conservative and make sure policies are rooted in credibility and making the party more democratic ? including following the Liberals' lead in making party membership free and attract a younger crowd.

### ERIN O'TOOLE

The Durham Region MP was up next with a message of a party having to learn from its loss. Despite doing ground breaking work on the international stage on child and maternal health and in other areas, he said the party ?allowed itself? to be painted as ?mean spirited, out of touch? and waging a war on science and veterans.

?I am a veteran and there was no war on us; we were doing more,? he contended. We weren't telling our story. We weren't talking about the amazing work we were doing on the economy, on rebuilding the Canadian Armed Forces around the world, our leadership role on child and maternal health [and foreign policy].?

The next leader, he said, needs to shake off that negative impression and work a committed campaign to extol what they stand for and rebuild the team.

### KELLIE LEITCH

Ms. Leitch took her opportunity at the podium to defend her divisive policies on immigration, particularly evaluating potential immigrants on whether they believe in ?Canadian values.? Canadians, she said, have an identity that is characterized by hard work, freedom, both personal and economic, and tolerance.

?Those [are] values we all share and that I say are the envy of the world and are the reason why individuals choose every day to come [to Canada]. Our country is the place where every immigrant wants to come because of those values,? she said. ?Our

immigration and refugee protection act is actually extremely clear; it is about nation building, who we are as a people, and who we are going to become: economically, socially, and culturally.

?How many of you have gone for a job interview? I am pretty confident all of you have handed in a resume to someone you wanted to work for. Did you then show up the next day and just take over a desk or were you interviewed by someone who owned that company? These are the ideas I am putting forward. We, as Conservatives, do the best when we're not afraid to take on the tough issues and put them on a solid foundation.?

#### ANDREW SCHEER

The Saskatchewan MP ? and former Speaker of the House ? also said it was ?critically important? to take lessons from the last Federal election. It wasn't policy that earned them a drubbing at the polls, he contended, but an ?intangible sentiment, that you could just tell there was a narrative we created for our voters in the party.?

?The right lesson would be how we communicated and the tone that was being presented,? he said, adding that they needed to zero in further on why their policy planks were good things. ?We don't lead with our intentions. I can't let Justin Trudeau do to my five kids what Pierre Trudeau did to my generation.?

#### CHRIS ALEXANDER

Ajax-Pickering MP Chris Alexander, Canada's former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, spoke of not only of his time in government but also of his career as a diplomat.

?We have a role to play in choosing a leader and renewing ourselves that is important not just for us, but well beyond our words,? he said. ?It matters for the direction of the world. The formula we're putting together is critical for our future, the broader future.

?We will be an example that is second to none with job growth, GDP growth, for trade, the liberalization of trade, as well as for immigration, openness, citizenship, integration, resettlement. We set new standards on each of those fronts over 10 years thanks to hard work, thanks to reform, brilliant economic policies? We can do that, but not if we have Liberals in office.?

#### RICK PETERSON

Last but not least was Mr. Peterson, the outsider candidate who is a British Columbia-based venture capitalist who also ran for leadership of that Province's Conservative party. An advocate of eliminating income tax and raising the GST, he characterized his platform as a ?radical, bold plan.?

?I have no other objective than to win in 2019 because the bloom has come off the Trudeau rose,? he said. ?Your GST is going to go up from 5 per cent to 9 per cent because I would rather tax consumption than income.?