

## Ford named Progressive Conservative leader after chaotic convention



**By Brock Weir**

Former Toronto councillor Doug Ford was named leader of the Progressive Conservative party Saturday after a chaotic leadership convention in Markham.

Ford narrowly beat fellow frontrunner ? and former PC MPP ? Christine Elliott to the party's top job by just 153 votes (6,202/6049), with leadership hopefuls Caroline Mulroney, PC candidate in York-Simcoe, and activist Tanya Granic Allen, coming in third and fourth respectively.

It was supposed to be a quick contest with the results of the first, second and third ballots, if needed, announced by 3.30 p.m. on Saturday afternoon, but after discrepancies were claimed by candidates, the vote dragged out until late into the evening, and Ms. Elliott withholding her concession until the following day.

?Leadership races can be tough on political parties, and for the candidates that compete in them,? said Mr. Ford in a statement. ?For me, there was no tougher part than running against Christine Elliott. I have been fortunate to call her my friend over the last two decades, and with good reason. There is no one I can think of that represents exactly what we need in public service: she is a dedicated mother, intelligent leader and hard-working volunteer who has shown tremendous compassion through her work with the Abilities Centre. Lastly, her commitment to our Party is second to none.?

Both candidates spent part of the last full week of the truncated leadership campaign in Aurora's two ridings, sharing their respective visions for Ontario ahead of the June 7 Provincial Election.

This will be the first year Aurora's Provincial riding boundaries will correspond with the re-drawn Federal boundaries introduced ahead of the 2015 Federal Election and, as such, Aurora will be divided at Wellington Street. Aurora north of Wellington will still vote in the riding of Newmarket-Aurora, while the south side will be part of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

Charity McGrath, who endorsed Mr. Ford in the leadership race, will carry the PC banner in Newmarket-Aurora, while the Blues will be represented in the south riding by Michael Parsa, who endorsed Ms. Elliott.

?It's exciting times,? said Mr. Parsa, who was on the convention floor, noting the break in the results created ?unease? among some of the party members. ?But, it was part of the process. Once they announced [the results] everybody was happy, ready to move on, and it is exciting times now.?

Although, at press time, Mr. Parsa said he had yet to speak with the newly-minted leader since the leadership vote was announced, he says he looks forward to interacting with him soon.

?Everything I've heard from everyone who knows him well has said he is a very inclusive guy, he likes to work with everybody and have the input of candidates,? said Mr. Parsa.

When asked why he endorsed Christine Elliott over the other candidates, Mr. Parsa said he has known her for a long time.

?There are certain things you look for, there's loyalty to the people you know and trust, so that was my main focus,? he said. ?I was happy every candidate had their strengths as well, and I personally knew Christine.?

In addition to the hitches that arose in electronic voting, there was electoral contention even before the voting closed with many Party members complaining they did not receive their personal PIN numbers in the mail allowing them to cast their vote in the

leadership process as the clock ticked down to last Friday's deadline.

This snafu led to a last-minute legal bid to extend the voting by a week, a bid ultimately rejected by the courts, which, in turn, ultimately led to frustration from members.

Among the thousands of potential voters unable to participate in the process was Aurora resident Greg Smith, who says he was looking forward to casting his vote for Mr. Ford. Mr. Ford, says Mr. Smith, is a 'disrupter' and that is an important quality to bring about change at Queen's Park.

But, his vote was not to be.

'I thought it put out a very bad message of, well, if you can't get your house in order and look after your own affairs, it puts doubt in people's minds whether you are going to be able to do that with the Province's affairs,' says Mr. Smith. 'I think they should have spent a little more time to get the system right before they went and put some firm deadlines on when the vote was, etc.

'I sent an email to the party, I also engaged with some of the candidates, with their teams, to see about helping out and, quite honestly, I did not hear anything back. I don't think it is my responsibility to spend a lot of time trying to track down the fact I haven't received anything. I can say quite honestly when we had a little get-together on Friday night, of the group sitting there, half of them did not have a verification letter.'

Nevertheless, Mr. Smith says this does not put a dent in his intention to cast a vote for the PC party in the spring, but there is a need to address 'systemic problems' within the party.

Ms. McGrath had not responded to The Auroran's request for comment by press time.