

## FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Patrick Brown

**By Stephen Somerville**

Joe Clark read the headline in one of the national newspapers the morning after Joe Clark won the Leadership of the federal Progressive Conservative Party in 1976.

Although this writer did not see any Patrick Brown headlines in any of the newspapers, a lot of people don't know who Patrick Brown was before winning the leadership of the provincial PC Party two weekends ago.

He is a lawyer, who has been a Federal Conservative MP representing the Barrie riding since 2006. Previous to this, he had been an elected local councilor in Barrie. His party affiliation goes back even further; he was the national youth president of the PC Party of Canada back in the early 2000s.

As a longtime volunteer with both the federal and provincial Tories, I have known Mr. Brown for about 17 years or so and I think he is a good choice for the party at this time.

His efforts in reaching out to non-traditional Tories are to be commended. He is an intelligent person with energy to burn; which he will need over the next three years as he prepares himself and the party for the opportunity to govern.

During the leadership campaign he spoke of three priorities - energy costs, transportation and red tape.

Addressing energy affordability in Ontario is so important. As we know, energy is inextricably intertwined with economic policy and the decisions made by our public officials affect our provinces' competitiveness and productivity, and ultimately our standard of living. We need to get this right.

Now that provincial PC members have chosen Patrick Brown as party leader, what's in store for the PC Party?

The party can get on with the very hard work of strengthening itself; recruiting new party members, raising funds and developing policy alternatives for the next election.

Speaking of policy, I am also very interested to see how the Party develops policy alternatives going forward.

Much has been written about former leader Tim Hudak's 'Million Jobs Plan' and the proposed reduction of 100,000 jobs to the public service jobs that he campaigned on during the last provincial election.

But what had not received much mention is that how neither elected PC MPP's or rank and file party members such as myself had any input into this very divisive party electoral plank.

The policy development process and how volunteers are engaged is very important.

Prior to the last election various 'white paper' were released, which dealt with a number of policy areas. However, this document was not the product of formal party member debate.

Patrick Brown and the Party need to go back to the future.

My hope is that all party members will have the opportunity for their say on policy going forward and that we have learned our lesson from this recent electoral setback.

Back in the early 1990's the party developed a plan that was discussed and debated within the various riding associations, and then at regional policy workshops before final resolutions were adopted after rigorous debates at a provincial wide policy meeting. These final policy resolutions became part of the party's platform

Party volunteers were energized, as they had the opportunity to make and influence party policy. This certainly did not mean that they won everything that they wanted - as the Leader and his campaign team craft a campaign strategy and theme out of the policy resolutions - but the grass roots were consulted, and listened to.

It was one of the reasons that lead to the PC Party winning a majority in 1995.

So, why is all this important to me here in Aurora in the late spring of 2015 as Ms. Wynne's Liberals will be holding power with a good sized majority until June 2018?

It is important for the simple reason that a democracy best functions when you have Opposition parties that are ready and able to potentially govern.

Knowing that the other guy can do the job is a great way to keep the incumbents on their toes.

This is especially important now, given the state and the challenges in our economy.

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