

Canadians ?deserve a real choice,? says leadership candidate Raitt



By Brock Weir

Following the 2015 Federal Election, which swept the Conservative party into opposition after nearly a decade in Government, re-elected MP Lisa Raitt was one of the first Conservatives out of the gate to speak out about what went wrong.

Now, in a crowded field of 14 vying for the party's top job, she says she brings a unique blend of experiences to the race which will ultimately decide the next Leader of the Opposition, and the next Conservative to battle for Prime Minister.

There were a lot of ridings which got ?abandoned? over the course of the last election, Ms. Raitt tells The Auroran, and she is in the race to bring the party back to the ?grassroots? and give ridings the resources they need to fight, regardless if the riding is traditionally Liberal or NDP.

Another takeaway from the 2015 defeat is ?communicating well with communities.?

?I want to be a leader that when [Newmarket-Aurora Conservative candidate of record Lois Brown] goes door-to-door she is proud of her leader and doesn't have to defend her leader at the door,? says Ms. Raitt. ?That is what happened in our last election, possibly because it was a long time we were in power. With me, it is a little bit different. I know what it is like to live that suburban small-town and middle-town kind of Ontario existence and communicate fairly well.?

Ms. Raitt is one of 14 candidates in a crowded ? and sometimes headline-grabbing ? field. She generated some of her own the day after sitting down with The Auroran as one of the loudest voices against allegedly fraudulent party membership registrations collected over the course of this lengthy campaign.

In a race with so many contenders, Ms. Raitt says her goal is to call ?as many thousands of people in Canada as possible, get them on the phone, and talk to them about what I think is important in a leader and how I envision our party going forward to win in 2019.?

?When I have these conversations, the feedback is always positive and I am being told consistently that I am in their top tier of choices and that is what I am looking at,? she says. ?For me, it is about explaining my experience to show that on Day 1 I am able to take over, giving them reassurances that I am going to put forward the best face for the Conservative party as possible.?

That face, she says, is not the one presented by one of the front runners, Kevin O?Leary, she says.

This past winter, Ms. Raitt launched a website called ?Stop Kevin O?Leary? out of what she says was ?fear [that in the next election under his potential leadership] we would be explaining away a lot of his past phrases, sayings and statements because they are not Conservative in nature, especially when it comes to the armed forces

?Sometimes they are inflammatory to the people we actually want to attract as a voter,? she says. ?You need to attract all kinds of votes to win government, especially a majority government in Canada, so you can't alienate people. It is difficult to have certain things brought up. Kellie (Leitch) is going to be dividing the party along those lines because there is going to be a strong reaction.?
But, she says, the reason you don't see one single obvious contender in the race getting higher than 22 per cent in polling is that it is

a ranked ballot situation and there is ?lots of room for people to coalesce around a candidate further down? the line. During her campaign stop in Aurora on Sunday afternoon, she faced questions from Conservatives expressing ?frustration? at what they saw as the Trudeau government's ?dismantling? of the tenets in the Victims' Bill of Rights, as well as a budding ?dictatorship? ? which Ms. Raitt didn't dispute, saying a ?dictatorship? comes through the Prime Minister's ?rebalance the power the opposition has versus the government.?

?I want to lead because I want us to win in 2019,? she says. ?I know I have lots of private experience, I have lots of cabinet experience, but what I bring to the race is a bit different than most. I am a mom of two. I have lived the suburban life for a long time. I know giving individuals the ability to do well is far better than government giving grants to help companies. That is where my head is and I thought it is a good brand of conservatism and Canadians deserve to have a real choice.?