

Parsa to carry Ontario PC banner in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill



By Brock Weir

Michael Parsa was bitten by the political bug at an early age.

Having arrived in Canada with his family from Iran at the age of eight, he soon became interested in an election on the horizon. Writing to all the candidates on the issues that mattered to him, the only response he received was from the Progressive Conservative party. It left a lasting impression.

Fast forward nearly 30 years and Mr. Parsa, 40, is now set to carry the Progressive Conservative banner for the newly created Provincial riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

The Richmond Hill-based businessman was acclaimed as the party's nominee in Aurora's south riding in a meeting held at Aw, Shucks! on Thursday night.

Having joined the party at the same time as PC leader Patrick Brown, he says the philosophy of the party is close to his heart. ?I am a small business owner, I live in the riding and my business is in Richmond Hill,? says Mr. Parsa, who ran as the Federal Conservative nominee in the riding of Richmond Hill last year. ?Some of the decisions that have been made by the [Ontario Liberal government] have made a great impact on me as a small business owner. My hydro rates have gone up immensely. I can't even put an amount to it. For a big corporation, they're okay with that. They can handle that. But, as a small business owner, I can't.

?I looked at the demographics of this area and most are middle class small business owners. When I say small business owners, I include chiropractors, etc. It has become very difficult for us to run our businesses and be successful and people don't have a voice.

?I think most people who get elected, with all due respect, are academics and lawyers, and very successful people, but to keep the lights on in a small shop or restaurant, a pizza store, a barber shop, or a furniture shop, in my case, it is very, very difficult. That is one of the reasons I decided to try and do my best to see if I could make a difference.?

Mr. Parsa has been in the furniture business since 1990, with his family operating three Mattress Mall locations in the GTA, including Richmond Hill. They came to Canada in the mid-1980s, he says, due to political pressure and unrest in Iraq.

As a youngster settled in a Francophone neighbourhood of Ottawa, he says he remembers a ?big culture shock? but people went out of their way to make them feel welcome.

?The love started early,? he says. ?It is not a cliché, but people have embraced us and they embraced me. I am an immigrant and they are giving me a chance to run [for public office]. How great is that? That is why I love this country. I am very excited about it.?

Mr. Parsa is no stranger to Aurora, having been involved in the two leadership campaigns of former area MPP Frank Klees. Mr. Klees was on hand to introduce Mr. Parsa at Thursday's meeting of the local riding association.

Speaking to the audience, Mr. Parsa noted his 25 years as a member of the Progressive Conservative party and outlined his plans to reach out throughout the riding, calling on his campaign volunteer to ?connect? with Aurora residents.

?I want to hear how we can improve and I want to know what I can do for us to win,? he said. ?When I say ?win,? here is what I am talking about. I will tell you the type of candidate I am going to be, and hopefully the type of MPP I am going to be: I want to reach out to every single voter in this riding. I don't care if they have been voting Liberal, NDP, or PC, I want to earn everyone's vote. I

want them to respect us and I want them to know we are going to have respect for their tax dollars, and I want them to know that we are going to be there every step of the way.

?One of the reasons I decided to run in this election was because of [Brown's] involvement. Patrick is truly the real deal. He is the hardest working guy. When Patrick approached me first to run, I [said to him], ?It is very difficult for me as a small business owner. Talk to me. Tell me, what are your policies?" When he started with education, he had me already. It is so incredible to hear a leader start his conversation with, ?Mike, we need to improve our education system because our youth deserve better. You and I had an opportunity.' He's right. We can do better in Ontario. This is a leader who gets it.?