

PC leader Brown sees positive change after last election? s ?unmitigated disaster?



By Brock Weir

?There will be an election in two years,? said The Auroran as we sat down with Ontario Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown at the Aurora Farmers' Market on Saturday morning.

?One year and 10 months,? replied Mr. Brown as he zeroed in on the task at hand ? not like he was counting or anything.

Mr. Brown spent the morning with Mayor Geoff Dawe and Councillor John Abel as they toured some of the points of interest in Aurora's Downtown Core, including the Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Public Library, and the Farmers' Market.

After meeting with area residents, he sat down with The Auroran for a wide-ranging interview on where he would like Ontario to be two years ? or one year and 10 months ? from now. In the short term, however, Aurora's provincial riding boundaries are set to follow the lead of the Feds in splitting Aurora into two ridings at Wellington Street.

That means there will be two candidates to pick, and the field is already starting to take shape, said Mr. Brown.

?I would like to see a candidate in these ridings who are rooted in their communities, who have a history of public service and involvement,? said Mr. Brown. ?I know there are a number of high profile candidates who have expressed interest and I am sure there will be large, active nominations here that will be fair, transparent and democratic.

?No candidates will be picked. It will be up to the membership, but we fully intend to win these ridings and we want community champions who will continue to build Newmarket and Aurora and help these communities with any challenges that we have.?

Mr. Brown said he was optimistic about the Progressive Conservative's chances of winning back Aurora, after Newmarket-Aurora was won by Liberal MPP ? and former Aurora Councillor ? Chris Ballard, who beat PC candidate ? and incumbent Newmarket Councillor ? Jane Twinney the last time around.

According to Mr. Brown, Ontarians have an appetite for change, a sense he says is bolstered by ?18 public opinion polls that have us across Ontario with significant leads in the 905.?

This is in stark contrast, he added, to where the Ontario PC Party was the last time around under the leadership of Tim Hudak.

?I think generally this riding is historically more conservative,? he said. ?I think it is only in a complete, unmitigated disaster that the Conservatives have lost here ? and the last election was an unmitigated disaster. The party ran on a ridiculous policy to cut 100,000 jobs. I think we were too narrow-cast.

?I think the reason we are in a better light today is we are building a more modern, inclusive PC party. I don't care who you love, where you're born, the colour of your skin, how much money you have, if you belong to a union or not, you have a home in our party.

?People want to be fiscally responsible. They want an honest, transparent government. They don't want something rabid and ideological. The public is fed up. They are fed up with a government with five OPP investigations, they are sick and tired of the hydro rates. They want a reasonable and pragmatic alternative and I think we're offering that now.?

To maintain the momentum, Mr. Brown said he and the party are going to ?continue working hard? to craft and present policies focused on becoming the ?building blocks? to return Ontario to prosperity and create a climate where Ontario is not a ?have-not province? and turn fortunes to bolster Ontario as a leader in Canada.

But, it is also about framing the Progressive Conservative as a more compassionate party, something that had been lost over time, he adds.

?I thought the party before was out of touch,? he said. ?I didn't run to say nice things and say it wasn't our fault we lost. It was our fault. The party only had 10,000 members. It needed a complete overhaul. We had become almost Republican in our positions, always voting against everything the Liberals did. I say there is no monopoly on a good idea. We will vote for anything if it makes sense for Ontario.

?I don't care if it is a Liberal idea or an NDP idea, if it makes sense for Ontario we will vote for it. I am not going to be blindly ideological or blindly partisan. Today, the party has over 80,000 members, of which I can tell you half of the membership is visible minorities. This is a very different PC party. I think what you're seeing is the PC party is very much reflective of Ontario today.?

In the next installment of The Auroran's interview with Patrick Brown, the PC leader weighs in on proposals to reform the Ontario Municipal Board, and Ontario's Places to Grow legislation.