

Appeal launched to Dufferin-Caledon Conservation MP Nomination

Written By Mike Baker

Eight days on from the controversial vote that saw Orangeville businessman Harzadan Singh Khattrra win the Conservative nomination in Dufferin-Caledon and the Citizen can confirm an appeal has been lodged with the party's local candidate nomination committee.

Speaking to the Citizen on Tuesday, Kevin Weatherbee, one of Mr. Singh's opponents during the nomination process, noted that while he himself wasn't responsible for any reported appeal, he had heard "an appeal has been confirmed".

"I did not file the appeal, but I can understand why someone did, because I have received a lot of complaints since nomination night," Mr. Weatherbee said. "What I've been doing, for my part, is asking everyone to forward their complaints on to Derek Clark, the local chair of the candidate nomination committee. Hopefully, the party will listen to these people and recognize some of these problems."

While the local party has yet to confirm any numbers from the vote, unofficial results posted on Facebook last Wednesday (March 20) indicated Mr. Khattrra led throughout the night. Using a ranked ballot, voters were asked to select a first, second, third and fourth choice at the polls.

With just 1,771 of the 3,800 eligible voters casting ballots in the first round, Mr. Khattrra received 796 votes, just short of the 50 percent of total votes required for an automatic victory, yet well ahead of Mr. Weatherbee, who received 468 votes, former Caledon Regional Coun. Barb Shaughnessy, who received 409 votes, and former Orangeville Mayor Jeremy Williams, who trailed with just 73 votes.

As is the case in ranked ballots, the individual who received the least amount of votes is eliminated ahead of a second round. In this case, the 73 votes tallied for Mr. Williams were divvied up to either Mr. Khattrra, Mr. Weatherbee or Ms. Shaughnessy depending on who the voter selected as a second choice.

At the conclusion of the second round of voting, Ms. Shaughnessy lagged behind in third place and was, therefore, eliminated. In the final round of voting, Mr. Khattrra garnered 852 votes to Mr. Weatherbee's 675 votes. By the final round, 244 ballots were considered spoiled and didn't count towards the final total. A source has informed the Citizen the majority of those spoiled ballots came from supporters of Ms. Shaughnessy, who, after selecting the former municipal politician as their number one choice failed to register a second, third or fourth selection.

Following last week's meeting, Mr. Weatherbee noted there were "serious issues" with memberships, referring to comments he received on the night from individuals who claimed to have been turned away from voting, despite being a party member. An interesting note "those who wished to participate in the nomination had to sign up for a membership by Feb. 14 to be eligible to vote.

Mr. Weatherbee stated he and his team had heard from more than 200 people since nomination night, with complaints being lodged on "varying issues". Approximately 60 of those complaints, Mr. Weatherbee explained, were made by local residents who say they were denied the right to vote.

"Any time someone signs up to join a party and feels like they haven't been respected, or haven't had their say, that's important," Mr. Weatherbee said. "Over the weekend, I had one lady call me and she was very upset because there was, apparently, some confusion over her membership. She called in on the day and wanted to know if she was (on the voters list) and she was told no, so she didn't come out. Now, she's getting standard membership outreach calls, asking for donations to the party. She's scratching her head asking what's going on."

He added, 'I guess, for my part right now, I'm trying to say 'okay, this is obviously a problem'. Do I have an answer? No. I don't know what the answer is, or what the potential reason or explanation for these issues are. That's why I'm trying to direct everyone to go through some kind of process to complain so that, hopefully, the party can get to the bottom of it.'

When asked to explain potential next steps following the apparent submission of an appeal, Mr. Clark, the chair of the Dufferin-Caledon Candidate Nomination Committee, refused to make any comments.

'My non-disclosure agreement prohibits me from discussing internal party matters,' Mr. Clark responded, via email. 'The party will, however, issue a notice this week to the Dufferin-Caledon membership.'

Details of that notice were not available as of press time.

Another of the candidates, former Orangeville Mayor Jeremy Williams, told the Citizen he was not responsible for the appeal. When asked for his thoughts on how last week's nomination unfolded, Mr. Williams said there's much that 'doesn't sit well' with him.

'Many CPC members that were there the night of the nomination meeting are still in shock. This is not the party they grew up with,' Mr. Williams said. 'The nomination meeting reminded me of when (Orangeville) council tried to improve (its) taxi bylaw. Taxi drivers jammed our Town Hall, yelling at Council and, ultimately, got their way.'

He added, 'The events of that night have given me concern about the future of the party and how well it reflects my own values. There was a lot I saw that night that just doesn't sit well with me. As a lifelong Conservative, that's hard for me to say.'

Repeated attempts to reach Ms. Shaughnessy and Mr. Khattria for comment were unsuccessful.

The 2019 federal election is scheduled to take place on, or before, Oct. 21 of this year. For more information on the Dufferin-Caledon Conservative Party, visit www.dufferincaledon.ca. To report a problem with last week's nomination meeting, contact Derek Clark at derek.clark@rogers.com.