

Contest coming for federal Conservative nomination

By Bill Rea

It's more than a year before the next federal election, but politics at that level are heating up in Dufferin-Caledon.

Incumbent David Tilson has learned he's going to have to fight off a challenge if he wants the Conservative nomination in next year's vote.

Palgrave area resident Paul Hong has announced he will be seeking the nomination.

Hong, 34, is a former senior policy advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving six years in that role under several ministers. In addition to his work at Foreign Affairs, Hong served for 13 years as a naval officer in the Canadian military. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (Navy) in 2004. He also served as a military aide-de-camp to the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. He is a graduate of the Royal Military College of Canada's Master of War Studies program and the Sea Cadet Program in Bolton. He is also a lawyer by training, called to the Bar in 2007.

Among his volunteer activities, he served as Vice-Chair of the Board of Caledon Community Services, and Chair of the Board of the local St. John Ambulance branch. He was also an organist at Holy Family Church in Bolton and is a member of the Knights of Columbus. For his volunteer efforts, he was awarded a Caledon Volunteer and Citizen Achievement Award for Community and Social Services in 2006.

"I am running because I am grateful for the opportunities that this country and community have given to me," he said. "Public service is a duty, and I would be deeply honoured to serve in this new way, as your candidate."

"We must not assume that our riding will always be Conservative," he added. "With each election, opposition will get stronger, and we must not underestimate the Justin Trudeau Liberals."

"In Dufferin-Caledon, we have an opportunity to renew ourselves and to prepare to meet this challenge," Hong said. "But we need to act now. We need to ensure our Conservative team has candidates who can fight and win this election, and the elections to come, to keep Trudeau out of government, and to continue providing the strong, principled leadership Canada needs."

Hong said he has no animosity toward Tilson, adding he's volunteered on his campaigns.

"I like him on a personal level, and I respect him," he said.

"The time to renew the party is now," he added. "With a renewal of ideas, energy, and enthusiasm, Conservative members in Dufferin-Caledon can be ready to keep our riding blue. I believe my extensive experience on Parliament Hill, in the offices of Cabinet ministers, and experience in our community will enable me to lead that renewal and to deliver results for our community."

Tilson said he's not put out by the challenge for the nomination.

"I'm confident I've done a good job representing Dufferin-Caledon over the years," he said, adding he plans to seek the spot on the ticket for the election, expected in October 2015.

"I think it's healthy to have a review," he added. "I think the Conservative supporters will agree with me that I've done a good job." Tilson has been MP since 2004. Prior to that, he was an MPP from 1990 to 2002.