

David Tilson fights off challenge to get Conservative nomination

By Bill Rea

The challenge was a strong one, but David Tilson was able to fight it off Friday night to keep the Conservative nomination in Dufferin-Caledon for the next federal election.

The long-time incumbent was up against Palgrave area resident Paul Hong.

It was announced that more than 650 votes were cast by party faithful who packed the hall at the Orangeville Fairgrounds. While the actual tally was not announced (the customary motion to destroy the ballots was passed just before the meeting adjourned), several sources later said Tilson only won by 11 votes.

"A lot closer than any of us thought," one person commented shortly after Tilson's acceptance address.

"It's been a great night," Tilson declared as he accepted the nomination.

He added the turnout showed the spirit of the party locally is as strong as ever.

"I'm confident we're going to have another majority," he said.

Tilson was also complimentary of Hong.

"There always has to be a winner, and I must say I'm glad it's me," he remarked.

Tilson later said the experience was just like an election, meaning there was a great sense of relief when he got the results.

"You're always worried when you run in an election," he observed, adding one has to deal with both highs and lows in politics.

He also said he had a large team of volunteers helping him all over the riding. "I owe these people a great debt for all the hours they spent."

Hong appeared to be in an up-beat mood after the meeting.

"We put our best campaign forward," he said. "I'm proud of what my team and I put forward."

He also said he will be on Tilson's side during the next election, which is expected next fall.

"I am a Conservative," he declared. "I will work on Conservative campaigns. I will work on keeping this riding blue."

Tilson stressed his experience in his address to the members, citing the success at keeping the riding Tory since 2004, and the steady increase in the Conservative percentage of the vote in every election since then. The count in Dufferin-Caledon in the last campaign was one of the highest for the party in Ontario, as he said he was ahead in every poll.

"We can all be proud of what we achieved in 2011," he declared, adding that success was due to the dedication that will be key to the next campaign.

Tilson also said his record speaks for itself, as he cited numerous accomplishments over his time in office, including federal contributions to Theatre Orangeville, the arena in Caledon East and Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness, as well as support for youth services and community groups.

He also stressed his connections in Ottawa.

"I work closely with my colleagues in Ottawa, as well as with the Prime Minister," he said.

Tilson also drew applause when he mentioned his private members bill, with toughened the penalties for those convicted of vandalizing cenotaphs or war memorials.

As well, Tilson said he has always been accountable, constantly attending community events throughout the riding.

He also stressed he has lived in the riding for more than 40 years, having started his law practice in Orangeville, so he knows the problems of starting and running a small business.

"I have built extensive relationships with community groups and organizations across this great riding," he declared. "We will need that experience the challenge Justin Trudeau and his lack of experience."

Hong had been stressing the need for renewal during his campaign.

"You are here because you believe in Conservative values," he said in his remarks.

He commented Trudeau poses a threat to those values, "and we believe he must be stopped."

"We can stop Justin Trudeau across Canada and right here in Dufferin-Caledon," he added, stressing that can only happen if the party members are prepared to make the tough decisions in the direction of renewal.

"Renewal is not an easy process," Hong said. "Renewal is an important part of all aspects of life."

He also said it's a vital part of the political process.

Hong also warned the Liberals under Trudeau are probably going to improve their standing after the 2015 election, probably regaining Official Opposition standing by taking seats away from the NDP and Tories. But he asked the party members to think about what could happen in the election of 2019 if Conservative fail to renew themselves.

?If we don't start to renew our ranks now, we will go into the 2019 election with a roster of inexperienced candidates Canadians don't know or trust,? he warned.

While expressing appreciation for all Tilson has done, Hong stressed this was the time for renewal in the riding, and that he was the one to lead it.



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