

Dufferin-Caledon Liberals looking toward next federal campaign

By Bill Rea

It's more than two years until the next federal election, but Liberals in Dufferin-Caledon are already working on strategies to take the riding that has traditionally been held by Conservatives.

Part of the plan involves a series of public forums to communicate with the membership and others, and the Dufferin-Caledon Federal Liberal Association held the first of those sessions last Thursday night in Mono Mills.

"We're starting a new era in this association," President George denHaan said to roughly 15 people who were on hand.

He said the association is operating with a new constitution and executive, and the plan is these sessions will be part of the innovations. He also said there will be a focus on enhancing the membership.

Andre Priede is in charge of operations for the association, and he said that covers things like election readiness. That will include the collection of necessary data, training volunteers and defining what he called an interface strategy, and he said they are working on defining that.

He also pointed out they have to set out timeline priorities, starting with the 2019 election and working back. With more than two years to go, he observed there's little point in training people how to go door-to-door at this stage.

Priede also said they have a group in place looking at differentiating between federal and provincial policies. As well, he said there are people in the association analyzing the results of the last election. They are also going to have to get used to handling social media tools like Facebook.

In addition, Priede said they need to get better at reaching out to the growing population in the riding, and having people find out more about the party.

Director Michael Forbes said he has been working on proportional swing models, which he said provides snap shots on the riding, as well as what victory could look like. They are also studying various areas of the riding, comparing how the vote patterns compared to the Ontario average.

When it comes to areas of strength, Forbes said the Liberals were strong in the downtown and southern areas of Orangeville.

"It's a mixed bag" in Bolton, he said, commenting the north hill area was strongly Conservative, while in the village core, there were Tory and Grit strongholds right next to each other. That will require more analysis.

He also said the Liberals were strong in the north half a Shelburne, and less so to the south.

Ed Crewson, the candidate in the 2015 campaign, is policy chair, and he addressed several issues concerning the environment, citing comments from former American president Barack Obama that "climate change is the greatest threat facing humanity."

The effects have already been felt, he added, through such events as forest fires, droughts, floods, etc. These events have had other impacts, including on insurance costs. He pointed to the claims resulting from the fires in Fort McMurray, Alberta, and closer to home, the flood damage in Toronto caused by heavy rains in July 2013.

"We're all going to pay the cost of climate change," Crewson warned.

Canada's plan to deal with climate change started in 2016 when First Ministers met in Vancouver and produced the Vancouver Declaration, which was to serve as a guide to the creation of a Canadian framework for clean growth and climate change. The first Ministers also recognized the importance of the targets set in the Paris Agreement the previous year. That agreement was looking at bringing global emissions to close to zero by the second half of the 21st century.

Crewson pointed out the Conservative government of Stephen Harper had agreed to lower annual greenhouse gas emission by 67 megatonnes by 2020 and by 200 megatonnes by 2030. But he said the emissions kept climbing.

The framework the Liberals are working on would set a minimum carbon price across the country of \$10 per tonne next year, rising by \$10 per year until 2022. Crewson said it's expected that emissions will decrease as prices go up and industry practices and consumer behaviour evolve.

Forbes said there is already polling data on this carbon tax.

"It was far more positive than you would think," he observed, adding it received majority support in Alberta. The main opposition, he said, seems to be coming from editorial boards of newspapers.

The evening also included some observations on new Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer, who denHaan said is sometimes referred to as "Harper with a smile."

He also pointed out Harper had a lot to deal with, such as facts conflicting with Conservative policy. He said the party was only able to work with a domineering and controlling person in charge.

Looking at the local situation, denHaan couldn't say if Conservative incumbent David Tilson will run again in 2019, but he was

confident Tilson will be opposed if he seeks the nomination.

Heading into the next election, denHaan said the Tories will have a financial advantage.

?They outfund us every month,? he said. ?That's a dangerous thing.?