

Leadership hopeful Patrick Brown speaks in Palgrave

By Bill Rea

If Ontario's Progressive Conservatives are going to form the next government at Queen's Park, they should look outside the current ranks for their leader.

That is a point Patrick Brown is stressing in his bid to be leader.

Brown, the MP for Barrie, was in the area last week, speaking at a reception at the Palgrave home of Derek Clark.

"I think the party needs someone from the outside," he commented, adding bringing leaders from outside caucus is nothing new. He cited the examples of Stephen Harper, Jean Chretien and Brian Mulroney as men who became leaders before they had been elected to seats in the House of Commons.

Brown also pointed to the Tories' unsuccessful election bid earlier this year, commenting he was wasn't involved in the announced cut of 100,000 public sector jobs that badly hurt the campaign of outgoing party leader Tim Hudak.

"I am proud to be part of a winning team in Ontario," he added, pointing to the Conservatives' success in Ontario during the 2011 federal campaign.

Brown also said he's drawn support from his caucus in Ottawa, with more than 40 MPs and seven Senators on side.

Caledon Councillor-Elect Jennifer Innis commented the party is at a cross roads.

"It's time we rebuilt our party from the grassroots," she declared. "Patrick understands the needs of our party."

"I'm excited about what we can do to fix the party," Brown declared.

He reflected that 71 per cent of voters had indicated they wanted change at Queen's Park, adding there were issues that the party could have done well running on. He said it was the people at the top who pushed the idea of the 100,000 job cuts, citing that as an example of the problem.

"We allowed a small group out of Queen's Park to run our party," he said.

Brown said there were 32 people running the policy platform going into the election, and a lot of them were involved in the faith-based school funding fiasco of the previous election.

He called for the decision making to be given back to the riding associations.

"We should give the part back to the membership," he declared, pointing out hockey players play as a team. "We in the PC party have been playing as individuals."

Brown maintained that he can build new relationships and restore coalitions the party used to have. The party currently has about 10,000 members, which he said is the lowest figure in about 50 years, not like the 100,000 they had when Mike Harris was successfully leading it.

He stressed the need for going after the undecided votes, showing the population the party will always be open minded. "There's no monopoly on a good idea," he declared, adding when the Liberals get something right, the Tories should say it.

People always respect sincerity, he added. "I've always tried to be genuine and sincere," he said.

Brown also said there are a lot of issues that could unite the province.

He said the cost to provide a long-term care bed is about one-tenth the cost of a hospital bed, but long-term care beds are full.

"We are essentially throwing our money down a bucket with a hole," he remarked.

Citing another example, he said police in Ontario spend about 40 per cent of their time dealing with mental health calls. That shows there aren't enough mental health workers.

Federally, Brown said the Conservatives did well in Toronto and other urban areas because they were ready to talk about transit. The provincial party was reluctant to talk about that. It's an important topic because transit is linked to trade.

"It's not going to be done overnight," Brown told the audience. "It's not going to be an easy fix."

Brown said the task is to get people to join the party again, meaning they will have to know things are going to be different; "a real grassroots policy process," he maintained. Members will have input on how the party's governed.

