

Shaughnessy claims out-of-riding residents voted in D-C nomination



By Mike Baker

Ten days after the submission of a second appeal to the Conservative National Council alleging several irregularities with the Dufferin-Caledon Tory nomination process, Barb Shaughnessy, one of the three unsuccessful candidates, says she has documentation proving out-of-riding residents may have voted in the process.

Harzadan Singh Khattrra emerged as the somewhat surprising winner of the nomination, which local Conservative members voted in on March 19. He beat out Kevin Weatherbee in the final round of voting, after Ms. Shaughnessy and former Orangeville Mayor Jeremy Williams had been eliminated in the ranked ballot voting system.

As reported in last week's Citizen, Ms. Shaughnessy filed an initial appeal on March 21, two days after the nomination. In that appeal, she stressed it does not specifically contest the vote tally, but rather calls into question the eligibility of some persons who may or may not have voted. That appeal was quickly rejected.

A second appeal was then lodged with the Conservative National Council. A decision was expected to come down late last week, but as of press time on Wednesday evening (April 10), a final determination had yet to be made. Speaking to the Citizen this week, Ms. Shaughnessy confirmed that her team had submitted additional documentation to the National Council that, in her words, shows that ineligible members had voted during the local process.

"Mr. Khattrra, he led an aggressive campaign that did, according to my affidavits, violate membership rules. He alone is responsible, in my opinion, for putting the Conservative Party in this difficult position," Ms. Shaughnessy said. "I firmly believe this was about self-interest rather than what was best for Dufferin-Caledon. I believe if he had acted more ethically and followed the party rules, like the other candidates did, then we would not be in this position."

She added, "The extra information we sent through to the National Council? It was about inconsistencies in the database. It was what I had identified previously, it was that we definitely had people from Brampton who considered their (primary) address to be in Brampton voting in Dufferin-Caledon."

When asked if she was claiming that out-of-riding residents had been allowed to vote in this nomination process, Ms. Shaughnessy

replied with a simple 'yes'.

When approached by the Citizen, Mr. Khattrra categorically denied the allegations, labelling them as false.

'There is nothing further that needs to be said beyond that,' Mr. Khattrra stated.

When asked if he was surprised to hear of multiple appeals being launched, essentially contesting his nomination, Mr. Khattrra simply maintained his belief that neither he, nor his team, had done anything wrong.

'Anyone would be surprised to hear an appeal. However, since my campaign didn't do anything wrong, to my best belief, I'm anticipating a positive result in my favour,' Mr. Khattrra said.

Reiterating why she felt it necessary to submit an appeal in the first place, Ms. Shaughnessy said she was simply following up on requests from 'many, many people in the riding'.

'There was only one way for this process to be reviewed, and that was for one of the candidates to submit an official appeal. Originally, I had no plans to submit an appeal. It was only after two days of relentless emails and calls, and realizing that the other candidates (Mr. Weatherbee and Mr. Williams) wouldn't be filing, that I decided to do it,' she explained. 'I couldn't ignore what I was hearing.'

She added, 'For me, it really all comes down to democracy. I firmly believe in our democracy and I think our democracy was challenged by the actions of one of the candidates.'

On top of allegations that out-of-riding residents voted in the Dufferin-Caledon nomination, Ms. Shaughnessy last week claimed that ineligible international students 'may, or may not, have voted' too during the process. During the nomination, only permanent residents and citizens of Canada were eligible to vote.

In other, more concerning, claims, Ms. Shaughnessy says she has spoken to individuals who have refused to divulge information 'out of fear'.

'I want people to understand that individuals are now afraid to come forward. They are afraid of their position in their community and they are also afraid for their livelihood. Trying to garner more information has become increasingly difficult,' Ms. Shaughnessy said. 'When I talk to members of the South Asian community, it's clear they're very divided on (Mr. Khattrra). I have to say, some members have really stepped up to the plate because they do believe in our Canadian democracy and they have been willing to help.'

Asked when she expects to learn of the National Council's decision, Ms. Shaughnessy said she really didn't have a timeline, but noted the fact nothing had been heard 'yet at least showed the issue was being 'strongly considered'.

'At this point, I've provided the National Council with everything that I can. I would love a decision. I've put myself out there, it would be nice to hear back, but all I can say is, if they're taking their time, they're taking their time because they understand the gravity of this issue. I would say they're reviewing everything carefully. I'd rather they do that than come back quickly with a rushed decision,' she concluded.

In a further communication with the Citizen, Mr. Khattrra stated he was simply moving forward in his role as Dufferin-Caledon Conservative nominee ahead of October's federal election

'I have been meeting with residents and party members in the riding to discuss Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, housing affordability and the challenges facing seniors. The Liberals are making life very unaffordable for middle class families in this riding,' Mr. Khattrra said.

In conclusion, in referencing the appeal, Mr. Khattrra said he has confidence in the system and is looking forward to the National Council making a final decision.

?Appeals are not uncommon in nomination races. The first appeal has already been rejected and I am waiting to hear back from National Council about the second appeal. I understand that some Conservative members may be disappointed that their candidate didn't win, but we need to stay united to defeat Justin Trudeau and his failed policies in the fall,? Mr. Khattrra said.