

Dufferin-Caledon is 'a riding we can win?' says likely Green candidate



By Mike Baker

While he has yet to be officially approved as the Green Party candidate in Dufferin-Caledon, local entrepreneur Stefan Wiesen is harbouring lofty ambitions ahead of the fall federal election.

The Green Party is hoping to ride a wave of momentum into this year's election. In the early hours of Monday (May 6), it was revealed that Paul Manly had secured the party's second Commons seat in a Nanaimo-Ladysmith byelection in British Columbia. Watching those results filter through from his home just outside Orangeville, Mr. Wiesen started to dream about what could happen in Dufferin-Caledon.

'I believe this is a riding we can win. I firmly believe we can take this thing home,' Mr. Wiesen said. 'I have a feeling that this is a good combination of right time, right policies and, maybe the people are starting to change a little bit with their thinking patterns. When you think about what the Green Party stands for, and what it offers to voters, we are a natural fit.'

Mr. Wiesen is thus far the only candidate to step forward for the Green Party in the local riding. He is expected to be confirmed as the official candidate at the Dufferin-Caledon Green Party AGM and nomination meeting on May 29.

It is sure to be an interesting campaign locally. For the first time in 15 years, Dufferin-Caledon is guaranteed to have a different representative in Ottawa following the vote, with incumbent David Tilson revealing late last year that he plans to retire at the conclusion of the current term.

While the Dufferin-Caledon Conservative Association sought to get a head start on campaigning, holding a nomination vote of their own back on March 19, the Party's National Council has upheld a decision by the National Candidate Selection Committee disqualifying the winner, Harzadan Singh Khattrra, over concerns that he or his team had broken Party rules when registering new members.

Mr. Khattrra was formally disqualified two weeks ago, yet no decision has been made regarding the party's next steps in Dufferin-Caledon. That, in Mr. Wiesen's mind, presents something of an opportunity to the other parties in the riding.

Asked how he intends to present the Green Party as a viable option to local voters ahead of the October vote, Mr. Wiesen said he will appeal to local residents' hearts and minds on the campaign trail.

'The issue people have, or have previously had, with voting for the Green Party, is that they consider it a wasted vote. In the polls, the Green Party candidates typically do quite well, yet, for some reason, when the vote comes around, not so much,' Mr. Wiesen

explained. "This has been a big problem for the Green Party for a long time, but I believe we have finally broken the curse. The Greens are electable on all levels, in all jurisdictions in this country."

Mr. Wiesen played an important role in the election of Mike Schreiner, who secured the Green Party of Ontario's first ever seat, representing the riding of Guelph, during last summer's provincial election. It was through meeting Mr. Schreiner that Stefan realized he was a Green at heart.

Born and raised in West Germany, Mr. Wiesen and his wife Pia emigrated to Canada in 1993. During his early years as a teenager and young adult, Stefan spent much of his free time volunteering on the executive of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, a centre-right political party.

After moving to Canada, Mr. Wiesen, who admitted he has both liberal and conservative beliefs, spent time getting to know the different parties, and political players in the Great White North. After putting his political aspirations to one side for several years while he focused on building his own business, Intrigue Media, Stefan caught the bug again in 2015. Four years ago, he had the opportunity to shadow current Dufferin-Caledon MP Sylvia Jones for a day down at Queen's Park. While he enjoyed the experience, he didn't think too highly of the way the political game is played in this country.

"I realized pretty quickly that, for the established parties, members are simply a puppet on a piece of string. They only do what their leaders tell them to do, vote in ways their leader tells to vote," Mr. Wiesen said. "I was speaking to a friend of mine, who is involved in politics, and he told me out of every 10,000 votes on Parliament Hill, maybe one goes against the party line. That is incredibly frustrating for me."

After learning more about the Green Party, and how leader Elizabeth May promotes independent thinking on campaign issues among candidates, he decided to put his name forward to try to bring about "real change" in Dufferin-Caledon, and, on a greater scale, in Canada.

Stefan's dream job would be to serve as Minister of Foreign Affairs, meeting with representatives from other countries to come up with "real solutions" for some of the environmental problems we're facing today. He believes the development of a geoengineering program, the deliberate, large-scale intervention in Earth's natural systems to counteract climate change, should be a priority for Canada over the next few years.

Referencing some of the issues likely to come up during this year's election, Mr. Wiesen said he is against anti-gun legislation, noting that weapons such as sporting rifles have an important part to play in rural Canada, where hunters help to keep the deer population to manageable levels.

He would like to see a national movement towards embracing the "jobs of tomorrow", calling on the federal government to provide funding opportunities that will encourage people to study newer technologies and professions.

Mr. Wiesen criticized the Liberal government's carbon tax, stating that while the Party's intentions may have been good, the result has been anything but.

"What they have come out with is an idiotic tax. For most people in this riding, we are normal people. We have farmers here. Working people who commute. I assume most people don't drive around just because gas is cheap, they drive around because they have to drive around," Mr. Wiesen said. "What this Liberal government is doing is punishing people, but getting very little (benefit from doing so)."

While maintaining that Canada needs to do its part to reduce its carbon footprint "Mr. Wiesen offered something of an alternative to the carbon tax, that being government intervention in the free market.

He suggested that the Canadian government implement hefty taxes to encourage businesses not to use cement when constructing

new buildings.

?For ever ton of cement, there are eight tons of carbon dioxide created. Out of driving cars, flying planes or heating homes, making cement is huge, a bigger (contributor) to emissions,? Mr. Wiesen said. ?If we were to tax cement like crazy, then we could perhaps use other, better materials, that right now are more expensive, to build our skyscrapers.?

The material Mr. Wiesen would like to see used is cross laminated timber. The product, he says, is used quite frequently in countries like Norway, but currently cannot be used in parts of Canada ? Ontario specifically ? due to restrictions in the provincial building code prohibiting high-rise structures made out of wood. If elected, Stefan promised to put forward a private member's bill requesting a change to the National Building Code, which he says would override each province's individual building code.

Over the coming months, Mr. Wiesen promises to engage with the community and show them why a vote for Green won't be a wasted one.

?I feel people are disenfranchised with the mainstream parties. We have to try and connect with the undecided people, as well as those who are not traditionally Green, while supporting our base voters,? Mr. Wiesen said. ?I have to have a positive campaign, and I will have a positive campaign. I don't know yet who my opponents are, but I'm looking forward to having some good, honest debates along the way and seeing who has the better arguments.

If you are interested in learning more about Mr. Wiesen, contact him at stefan.wiesen@greenparty.ca.