

Politician George Smitherman gets warm welcome

By: Jane Dougan

An audience of 75 plus at the Acton Town Hall Thursday gave a warm reception to an onstage Q&A conversation between Mayor Rick Bonnette and Canadian politician and broadcaster George Smitherman.

Smitherman will run for Toronto city council in 2018 and is penning a memoir, tentatively titled "Unconventional Candor". The Wellington-Halton Hills Federal Liberal Association Annual General Meeting followed. Bonnette reminded the audience of Smitherman's key support for Georgetown Hospital "during a time of crisis" when he was provincial Liberal cabinet minister for Health and Long-Term Care (2003-2008).

Smitherman first got hooked on politics at 15 when he heard Pierre Trudeau speak. "He made politics interesting to me", especially later as a gay man recognizing the critical importance of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.



Mayor Rick Bonnette and George Smitherman

Politics is what "comes most naturally, gives me the most joy, the most productivity." Smitherman spoke candidly in response to Bonnette's questions. Regarding the upcoming legalization of marijuana, he said, "I think everyone was unrealistic about how complicated it is, especially the appropriate model for distribution amongst the various provinces, territories and

municipalities ... You're going to see Health Canada with a very dynamic public education effort." Indigenous affairs? "The Indian Act is still well-intentioned paternalism. I would roll up all the dollars, give them to the First Nations and let them run with it. We have to respect them at a governmental level and give them responsibility and accountability to deliver their own services and

programs to their own people." Former Conservative leadership candidate Kevin O'Leary? "A self-servant, not a public servant."

The widowed father of two young children worries about the federal and provincial debt load that future generations will inherit. Smitherman took questions from the audience and agreed warmly that it was "worth the drive to Acton."



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