

POLITICS: Former York Region MPP runs for Liberal party presidency

Sorbara leaves sports and returns to politics

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

A week ago, Greg Sorbara was the owner of a minor league baseball team. Now, he's making a run to be president of the Ontario Liberal Party.

"I am moving from a noble sport to a bloody sport," said Sorbara after he threw his hat in the ring for the election to be held at the Liberals' annual meeting Nov. 25 to 26 in Ottawa.

The former York Region Liberal MPP was approached by several party members about the job right after he sold the St. Catharines Stompers Class A baseball club to American interests last month.

"To be honest, (the party presidency) wasn't even on my radar screen a few months ago, but it all came together following the sale of the baseball franchise."

"This wasn't even next on my agenda but in the end, I felt I could help when the call for help came."

Sorbara, a Richmond Hill resident who works for his family's real estate development company in Woodbridge, has received an endorsement from Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty in the race to succeed current president Tim Murphy, a former MPP.

Scarborough-Rouge River MPP, Alvin Curling will also seek the post.

Sorbara said current MPPs should be barred from serving in the volunteer position of party president because the caucus should be independent from the party executive.

One of the main issues at the November meeting will be Dalton McGuinty's leadership. Sorbara will ask party members not to vote for a leadership

review.

"Dalton has continued to grow from the first day he was elected leader. He made a lot of mistakes, as new leaders often do, but fought a good election," he said. "He will fight a great campaign in the next election."

With the party incurring a \$3-million debt during June's provincial election, Sorbara realizes his business contacts are a major reason why he's being touted as president.

"I'll make no bones about it," said Sorbara, a former cabinet minister who was an MPP from 1985 to 1995.

"A major task of this job is to lead the fundraising campaign for the party and that's one of the reasons why these guys put the screws to me in asking me to do this."

"We have a significant debt right now that has to be retired before the coffers are replenished. But fundraising just doesn't come from the development industry, since they support both the Conservatives and Liberals. The magic is to identify and create new ways to raise funds."

Aside from raising capital, the president is part of the policy-making process and will work closely with the riding presidents to ensure the party has a strong organizational base across the province before candidates are selected for the next election.

"This is my party, one that I believe in and hope will once again govern Ontario," said Sorbara. "And a political party and political system only works well when individuals take time out to serve on jobs like this."

"If people don't, then the system breaks down."

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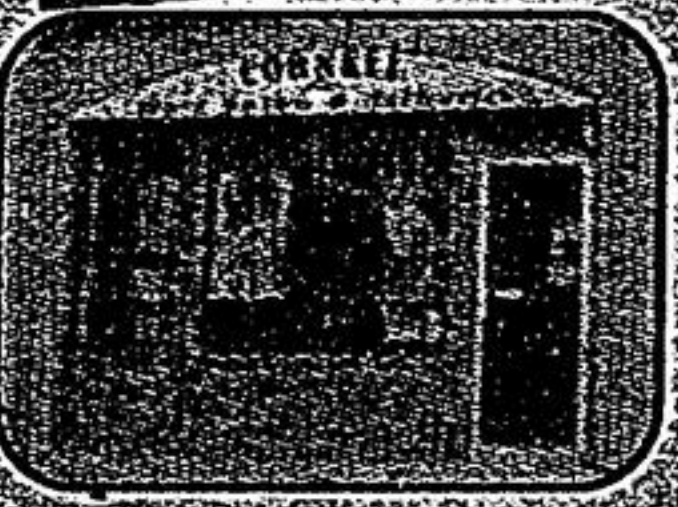
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