

Long launches leadership bid on friendly turf

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Trying to duplicate the success the provincial Tories have enjoyed in York Region, Tom Long came to Woodbridge to announce he wants to lead Canada's newest political party to victory in the next federal election.

Long, a backroom political organizer for two decades, told supporters at the Royalton Banquet Hall Thursday he's running for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance.

"Canadians are open to change in Ottawa and, my friends, mainstream Conservatives want to win," he told a crowd of about 150 enthusiastic supporters who clapped to Can't Stop This Thing We Started, the Bryan Adams hit Mike Harris used in last summer's election campaign.

Long pledged to raise Canada's standard of living, cut taxes and create more wealth.

A former lawyer who calls himself a "small-c conservative," Long opposes social housing and wants private enterprise to play a significant role in health care.

He admitted it will be tough to beat the Liberals, who all but swept Ontario during the last two federal elections.

"I have been involved in (winning) campaigns before where we were way behind," he said.

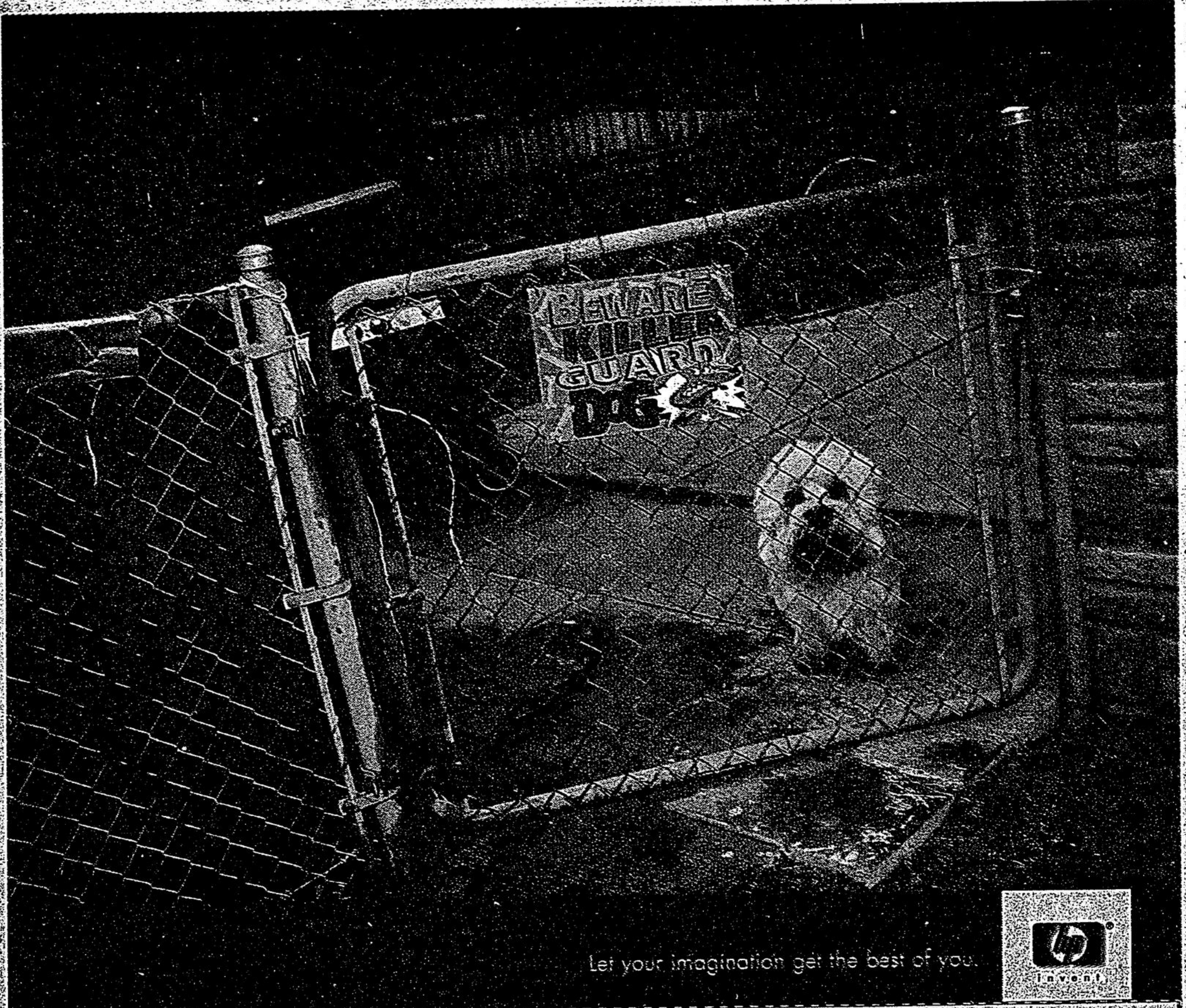
Largely unknown outside political circles, Long grew up in Sarnia and established a business during a recession. Despite his success, he will have to win support of Canadians wary of political figures from Ontario.

But Long said voters will identify with his platform. It resembles that of the Harris Tories, who took all the seats in York Region and won in Ontario during the last two provincial elections.

Voters won't relate as much to him as to the Canadian Alliance, Long told The Liberal.

"I think they do want a party that is prepared to talk common sense," he said. "I'm very much of the ilk of ... (Ontario Premier) Mike Harris. That's the kind of leadership I want to bring to Ottawa."

But Oak Ridges MP Bryon Wilfert isn't so sure Long can ride the success of provincial Tories in the next federal election, which he predicted will come next year.



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