

'Deeply personal' issues become public in politics

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In the statement of claim, the sisters further state their brother used the power of attorney to take out a \$240,000 mortgage on their mother's Ballantrae farm, wrote a \$25,000 cheque to himself and charged a total of \$7,800 on one of their mother's charge cards without her knowledge or consent.

In court documents filed by Mr. Calandra, he denies mishandling his mother's assets. He states the request to remove him as power-of-attorney was neither initiated nor made by his mother and the process was driven by his sisters, who were motivated by self-interest.

Mr. Calandra said he did not want to comment further about the case.

"This issue deals with my late mother's estate," Mr. Calandra said. "It is a deeply personal matter. It is unfortunate that it has gone toward the court. I'm hoping it will come to a resolution and be amicable for all sides."

In a statement, Ms Gehring and Ms Calandra said what could have been a "private family" matter has found its way into the courts.

'The Liberal Party doesn't want to be embarrassed.'

'The party wants someone who has the qualities that the public wants.'

"Out of respect for our late parents, we all had an opportunity to be fair, caring and equal in our approach to the handling of the estate," Ms Gehring and Ms Calandra stated. "Unfortunately, our brother acted in such a manner that he left us feeling both sad and bewildered."

Meanwhile, when Gus Khouri decided he'd like to take a run at the federal Liberal candidacy in Newmarket-Aurora, he didn't know he had to answer a 40-page questionnaire, supply documents and go through a police check.

The 23-year was asked if he has ever been arrested, kicked out of school, fired from a job, declared bankruptcy, had tax troubles or been named in a court case, civil or otherwise.

"I didn't mind the questions or having to go to the police for a clearance," Mr. Khouri said. "It has to be done. The Liberal Party doesn't want to be embarrassed. The party wants someone who has



PAUL CALANDRA: Oak Ridges-Markham Conservative candidate embroiled in family lawsuit.

the qualities that the public wants." Before Susan Wadsworth got the nod as the Green candidate in Unionville-Markham, she had to be approved by party leader Elizabeth May.

"A potential candidate declares an interest, fills out a five-page application form to be approved by the party leader," Venessa Long, a Newmarket-Aurora Green party official said. "There's no police check. We expect self-disclosure because we work on the honour system."

When New Democratic Party hopefuls Simon Strelchik of Thornhill, Wess Dowsett of Richmond Hill and Sylvia Gerl of York Simcoe each made their bid for a spot on the ballot, they had to jump through party hoops.

Life's pins and needles for all federal wannabes, especially Mr. Calandra. Since Stephen Harper's minority government could be dissolved at any time, candidates must be election-ready. With a lawsuit hanging over his head, the Ballantrae resident has a full plate.

Mr. Calandra won the Oak Ridges-Markham federal nomination in a three-way race in March, defeating Andrew Keyes of Markham and Caroline Allesley of Oak Ridges.

The 36-year-old insurance broker has a history with the Conservatives at both the federal and provincial level. He worked in the office of former MPP and provincial Tory cabinet minister Steven Gilchrist and, up until last week, he was president of the provincial Oak Ridges-Markham Conservatives.

He was one of the key organizers to attract more than 1,000 Conservatives to a Markham high school June 2 where Whitchurch-Stouffville Councillor Phil Bannon was chosen candidate for the Oct. 10 provincial election.

In the run-up to the Conserva-



GUS KHOURI: Aurora-Newmarket Liberal candidate didn't expect 40-page questionnaire

tive nomination, Mr. Calandra answered the party's 35-page candidate-search questionnaire and was interviewed by a three-member candidate-search committee.

"I told them about the suit," Mr. Calandra said. "The nominating (search) committee knew about it and the party knew."

Committee chairperson Solette Gelberg told the Sun-Tribune she had "no knowledge of a lawsuit".

One day later, after calling the candidate, the King Township resident called the newspaper and said Mr. Calandra "may have mentioned" the legal matter, stressing three potential candidates were each interviewed for two hours.

'We Conservatives are pretty tight-lipped about these things. What's internal, stays internal.'

Mr. Calandra's campaign website states he opened and successfully operated two businesses "after completing university".

What it doesn't say is Mr. Calandra did not graduate from Carleton University. Initially, he told the York Region Media Group he had a university degree and then after persistent questioning, he said he did not graduate because he was short credits required for a degree.

After being informed of what Mr. Calandra's website states, Ms Gelberg suggested Mr. Calandra should "fix" the education information.

A day later, she told the newspaper Mr. Calandra informed her he has enough credits for a university degree.

"He just hasn't applied (for the degree)," Ms Gelberg said.



BELINDA STRONACH: Education and marital status were discussed during leadership bid.

"His website says he completed university. For him, he was finished."

The fact Newmarket-Aurora MP Belinda Stronach dropped out of York University after attending for one year is no secret.

The education issue, along with two divorces, attracted much media attention when in 2003, she ran for the Conservative leadership and again, when, in a surprise move in 2005, she crossed the floor and joined the Liberals.

Some suggest Ms Stronach does not have a history of steadfastness when it comes to husbands or education.

Still, Ms Stronach never altered information about either her education or her marital status.

The issue is not how much education a candidate has. It's about truth. It's about how truthful a candidate seeking a seat in Parliament is about all things, including education.

Political parties, especially the Liberals have been stung by candidates fudging resumes.

Even though few Grits would admit it, the 1994 ghost of Jag still haunts them.

Markham-Stouffville MP Jag Bhaduria was booted out of the caucus and out of the party.

Mr. Bhaduria captured headlines across Canada when he was caught lying about his education on his resume and writing a threatening letter to his former employer at a Toronto school board.

Mr. Bhaduria's antics sparked quite a reaction — more than 35,000 constituents signed a petition calling for his resignation, a standing-room only crowd took over a Markham hall demanding to know how such a dishonest individual found his way into a House of Commons seat.

Some went one step further

and picketed the shamed Liberal's home.

The Jag issue, no doubt, helped change political parties' protocol when scrutinizing potential candidates.

The Liberals demanded documented proof of Mr. Khouri's education — he recently graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Ottawa.

As well, when former Aurora mayor Tim Jones jumped into the local Liberal nomination race, he, too, went under the party's microscope.

"I had to give my high school and university records," Mr. Jones said. "I had to go to the police station. They got it all out of me before I got the green flag."

Mr. Khouri and Mr. Jones are waiting for the federal Liberals to give the go-ahead for the local nomination. Newmarket-Aurora became vacant when Ms Stronach announced she is not seeking re-election.

Canada's political parties don't all take the same approach when it comes to what's public and what's not.

'I had to go to the police station. They got it all out of me before I got the green flag.'

The Green Party doesn't pry into their potential candidates' backgrounds; the Liberals post their complete candidate-search questionnaire on the party website; neither the New Democrats or the Conservatives allow their questions to be made public.

David Schellenberg, the communications officer for the Conservatives, said the party's candidate search process is considered an internal matter.

"We Conservatives are pretty tight-lipped about these things," Mr. Schellenberg said. "What's internal, stays internal."

Since the Conservatives' search process is dominated by secrecy, nobody knows if Mr. Calandra or the other federal candidates are honour-bound to declare if they're involved in a lawsuit or if they're required to give documented proof of education.

The bottom line is: If you're seeking a seat in the House of Commons, your life should be an open book.

Of course, you should tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Canada deserves nothing less.



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