

Politis sets sights on provincial election | Your online newspaper for North Bay, Ontario

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Newly-minted Progressive Conservative candidate Peter Politis rallies the crowd during the last run of the Ontario Northlander in September.

COCHRANE – After two-and-a-half years in the mayor's seat, Peter Politis has thrown his hat in the ring as the Progressive Conservative candidate for the riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane in the next provincial election.

He received the PC nod during the riding nomination meeting last month.

"I think this is a good opportunity to get a seat in the room where decisions are being made. It was an opportunity that I didn't feel should be passed up," he told the News.

Politis is insistent that he is not moving into provincial politics as part of any previous conceived plan. "This is not a life target," he said. Despite having been previously approached by both the Liberals and the PCs "I have been very content to be mayor and effecting regional change from that seat."



But during his time in the mayoral chair he says he had become frustrated by what he calls "the slippery slope" of provincial decision making that is seeing Northern Ontario "escalating towards no future."

PC leader Tim Hudak was "aggressive in his approach to me," Politis said "The leader himself and the PC Party committed to working with me on creating policies in the North that would be a game changer and change Northern Ontario forever."

Last week the PCs announced a northern vision based on the belief that Northern Ontario is the expanding edge of the provincial economy and has previously released a series of White Papers that speak to Northern revitalization in the areas of mining, forestry, agriculture, all based on a resource revenue sharing model.

"That northern vision is one of the reasons I decided to run for the nomination," Politis said. "I think this is the one party that understands we have to rethink Northern Ontario so that northerners take control, make our own plans, and put them in place. This is a party that has the right vision in advance of being in power."

For too long, Politis says the government has ignored the opportunities of the northern part of the province.

"We have been marginalized," he said, "treated like a colony and not an active part of the province."

Calling himself a "passionate northerner," Politis said he told Hudak that if he wins the nomination "I will be a northerner first, and party member second."

For Politis painting himself with a blue brush means following in the footsteps of great Northern Ontario leaders like MPPs Alan Pope and Rene Brunelle, and it also means working to reestablish some of the ideologies the party espoused during their terms.

"I want to change the way people see the PC party in Northern Ontario," he said. "I want to put the 'progressive' back into it. Northerners are progressive by nature and we cannot build the economy if we don't bring the people along with us.

"The whole reason we are here to begin with are the people and their ability to drive the economy and our way of life. It's incumbent upon us to find the solutions, even reinventing some of the current approaches, to make sure people have every opportunity of having their needs in life realized."

A management consultant, with an extensive background in aboriginal negotiations and mediation, Politis says he believes in “innovative solutions” and says he brings key disciplines to the table, including facilitation, people management, business and strategic planning and risk management.

He has experience in key roles throughout the forestry industry, including as mill manager, which he says gives him a solid understanding of natural resources industries and their dynamics and calls himself “a straight shooter who is tired of what politics have become. Ministers say nothing, and stay neutral, but that’s not what people want.

“Leaders have to be comfortable taking a position,” Politis said. “As a leader you often have to make unpopular decisions that are the best for the group at large. You can’t be afraid to stand up and give direction.”

That lack of direction has been a large component of his frustration with the current Liberal government.

As a member of the steering committee that developed the current Northern Growth Plan Model “I have been very discouraged,” he said. “We presented something that was forward thinking and its been sitting on a desk somewhere since last summer. The Liberals keep referencing it, but the truth is, there is no Northern Growth Plan.

“That’s another sign of why (the PCs) need to be in office. The Liberals are giving lip service to the north with no action on the ground. In Northern Ontario, we are not one step further ahead then we were when I became mayor over two years ago,” Politis said, “and the cynicism continues to grow.”

He finds the prospect of working alongside Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli, exciting.

“I have a world of respect for Vic,” he said. “I believe he will be a true influence in the PC party and I would hope we could both bring change that will help the north. I’ve been on the front yard protesting, and now I’m extremely excited about having the opportunity to be in the room where the decisions are made.

The riding of Timiskaming/Cochrane is currently held by New Democrat John Vanthof and prior to the last election long-time Liberal cabinet minister David Ramsay.

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