

N.B. Nov. 18 election:

Party politics said to stifle competition

AN OPINION FEATURE
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Lawrence Garvie, provincial health minister, was nominated Monday night by the Fredericton North Progressive Conservative association to represent their party in the Nov. 18 provincial election.

He defeated no one.

Observers in the past have said a stifling degree of parochialism—in the sense of party loyalty—exists in New Brunswick politics. They would have had plenty of material to work with Monday.

One person present at the convention—a non-partisan photographer on assignment for a Saint John newspaper—said “it’s not fair—it’s impossible for anyone else who really wants to work (for their riding) to get in.”

Before the meeting began he informed a listener Garvie would win the nomination. He added there was no doubt former Victoria Public Hospital chief surgeon Everett Chalmers would win the PC nomination in

Fredericton South at their convention Oct. 29 and businessman Carl Howe would be a sure choice for the Liberals in the North constituency.

He risked little with at least his first and third predictions. The Liberals Oct. 23 chose Howe and University of New Brunswick professor Dan Hurley to contest Fredericton South—both by acclamation.

Ralph Turnbull, PC president for Fredericton North, was telephone interviewed by The Brunswickan before the session began. Although 285 delegates were empowered—as registered PCs—to nominate and vote for a candidate, he said he didn’t expect there would be any competition for the nomination. Ninety-six were present Monday.

Turnbull said the association hadn’t been prepared for the election and had expected one to be called in the spring. However nominations had been open since the election announcement “and really before that...” he added. He estimated 20 party members had been invited to run for nomination. Turnbull said he had been interested in the nomination and the seconder to Garvie’s nomination, Ron Roe, had indicated in interest.

Turnbull said he expected changes in the present constituency system—that Fredericton would be split from two ridings to four or five, allowing more persons to serve the area.

He said in the meantime, however, “you’ve got to find people who will win for you—people you can sell to the general membership.” Given a guess, he said, Chalmers would win the city’s South PC nomination.

The convention was more than a mere formality, however. Provincial premier Richard Hatfield was guest speaker.

The premier passed through the audience before the convention and shook 96 hands. His speech was preceded by an introduction—in grotesquely commercial style—by PC youth federation president Cynthia Urquart.

Urquart came across as a quaint sample of Middle Canadian cherry pie, beaming almost to the point of luminosity. She informed her listeners “have I got a deal for you” in the premier, whom she described as “the man who put the province on its feet” following the Liberal regime.

Then Dickie wowed ‘em.

He wooed the little guys—praised the workers who backed good, honest candidates in recent by-elections in the York and Cambellton ridings. He cajoled them with humor, titillated them with a bit of choice mud-slinging and staccatulated them into virtual euphoria.

Commitments to the PC nomination convention in York South forced him to leave before the results were known. However, Hatfield said “it would be amiss” of him not to say a few words

about the work of the health minister before departing. Apparently, he wasn’t too worried alienating other party hopefuls.

Then federal parliament member Robert Howie spoke in support of Garvie. Then Chalmers spoke in support in Garvie.

Then came the call for nominations. After a dramatic silence of 15 seconds Dave Neill made his way to the podium and made a short speech which included veiled references to a certain cabinet minister. SURPRISE!!! Lawrence Garvie had been nominated.

A veteran news writer who covered the Liberal convention Wednesday said he had expected those acclamations. He reasoned both Fredericton ridings—especially the North—would lean toward the Tories.

“They (the Liberals) know any effort here is probably wasted,” he said. The idea of a convention, he observed, was mostly an empty concept.

Ideally, nominating conventions are aimed at selecting the best man to represent a party in a riding. Apparently none of the delegates in the entire riding could find anyone comparable to Garvie. It is also a matter of speculation whether any party would want a cabinet member to be defeated in his bid for nomination.



Liberal president Norbert Theriault addressed Wednesday's meeting