



Cambridge Chamber of Commerce MasterMind Series
"Setting Our Sights on the Federal Election"

Objective and Outcome: With the looming federal election this fall, following a four-year Liberal majority government that has had a rocky ride with Chambers by insisting small businesses continue to ante up their hard-earned money and have taken away advantages of income splitting, it is imperative that we ask questions that make sense to business. The business community in Cambridge needs representation, regardless of the party in power, that will fight for our local interests. Therefore, we discussed what are the right and relevant questions that should be asked when a politician - whose main job should revolve around being a good steward of the public's purse - knocks on your door. Our invited members discussed many issues surrounding politics today and what qualities potential candidates must have in order to navigate these troubled waters. The following questions surfaced:

- **What would proportional representation do for the business community? Will it provide more voices and less of a monopoly in terms of our political process?**

The group discussed this issue at length, highlighting the fact that with the multi-party system we currently have in place there must be a way for members of these parties to be better represented. As well, it was recommended that potential Liberal candidates be asked pointblank why electoral reform, which formed the pillar of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's campaign platform in 2015, did not happen as promised.

Q – During his 2015 campaign, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared this would be the last first past the post-election for Canadians. Is electoral reform a priority for your party?

- **How can candidates find middle ground on issues?** In the age of social media, it has become apparent that divisive opinions have escalated between those classified as members of the 'alt-right' and 'alt-left' on a variety of topics, leaving little ground for those who consider themselves representatives of the 'sane centre' to stand upon. The group determined the media has a role to play in this issue and should stop 'fuelling' the flames between these two fractions and that we need politicians who aren't afraid to claim some ground between these two extremes.

Q – Today it seems politicians govern by social media commentary, when in fact the majority sit in the middle of those who populate the alt-right and alt-left. How will you ensure what we at the Chamber refer to as the 'sane centre' is heard?

- **Are you prepared to balance the budget and make hard decisions that won't sit well with all voters?** It has become painfully apparent that fiscal policies implemented by the Liberal government at both the provincial and federal levels have caused concerns and that tough decisions need to be made. Our participants discussed the fact that too much

conflict reigns between the 'alt-right' and 'alt-left' every time when decisions have to be made and that candidates must be willing to face criticism when it comes to budgeting.

Q- It seems the squeaky wheel gets the grease, however, that again leaves the vast majority of the electorate on the outside looking in. Are you prepared to make the tough decisions to balance our budget and control debt accumulation? And how will you do that in a party setting?

- **Are you responsible enough to tell voters the full truth and not make promises you can't keep just to satisfy certain sectors?** Although members of the group agreed it would be very difficult to find a potential candidate willing to be that truthful, there was consensus that many business leaders are tired of 'wasting time' trying to follow-up with politicians who made them promises during their election campaigns pertaining to business and never delivered on them.

Q- It is apparent to business leaders that promises made at election time are not promises at all. Growing our economy must be the No. 1 priority for government, yet when it is time to deliver on these promises, it keeps getting pushed off in favour of the minority voice. Will you stand up for your party's promises for business, and will you champion initiatives that grow our economy through business?

- **Are you an honest person?** As already mentioned, being a good steward of the public's purse should be the No. 1 priority of any politician. However, the group questioned whether how well a politician accomplishes this. It was suggested that too many politicians spend the majority of their time trying to get re-elected and telling voters what they want to hear (more so at the provincial and federal levels of government).

Q- The primary purpose of any elected person is to be a good steward of the public purse, however, we know that means sometimes upsetting some voters. Most spend much of their time in office trying to get re-elected, how do we know you won't be that person?

- **Are you willing to admit to mistakes when a potential scandal surfaces that could harm your own leadership and your party?** The recent SNC-Lavalin scandal involving Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has brought the issue of integrity to light, especially for those around our discussion table. It was suggested those who classify themselves as the 'sane centre' may have been more willing to forgive Trudeau had he admitted early on that he had made a mistake. And even if that early admission did nothing to quash the current discontent with Trudeau's Liberal government, the group suggested it would be more admirable if political figures facing defeat 'go down with dignity' rather than try to cover up their mistakes and force their party members to stand by them.

Q- We all make mistakes and covering them up always ends up in a bad place, creating a cloud of dishonesty around government and politicians. Are you willing to stand up and admit mistakes, and lead with the utmost integrity?

- **What are you going to do to beef up our workforce, especially in the trades?** A discussion emerged centred on the need to do more for young people in our education system, as well as bring changes to our immigration system, to ensure we have a vibrant and robust workforce in the trades industry. Some of those around the table, especially those in the trucking industry, reported having serious trouble finding qualified employees. (The issue was also raised that learning about the importance of budgets should be a priority in our education system to assist the future generations make decisions).

Q- The No. 1 issue facing virtually every business today is a lack of talent, and it can even be described as just “people.” Even frontline jobs cannot be filled; what would your party do to tackle the shortage of skilled trades as well as the shortage of frontline staffing?

- **What would you do to fix our ‘broken’ immigration system?** Discussion centred around the arrival of illegal immigrants crossing the border from the U.S. into Quebec and how our current system needed work to reduce, or stop, this human flood, instead using proper legal channels to ensure those seeking safe refuge find it. It was also suggested the immigration system itself needed to be revamped to ensure those entering the country legally with skills, such as doctors or tradespeople, receive incentives to settle where they are needed the most and not end up all in the same areas in occupations that have nothing to do with their training.

Q- It seems for more than 30 years we’ve been saying that immigrants will be filling the jobs of the future, yet in that time, no government has actually fixed our immigration system so businesses can get the people they desperately need. Time is of the essence to correct this so we can grow our economy. What will your party do to fix the immigration system to enable employers to find the needed people they require for their businesses?

- **Why do we have so many people trying to live on minimum wage and what changes should be made to fix this?** A spirited discussion arose – highlighting the pros and cons - regarding the issue of raising the minimum wage and what this could mean for both workers and business. However, there was mutual agreement that job creation numbers often touted by politicians are misleading since any ‘increase’ in jobs usually falls in the minimum wage category, not those earning \$50,000 or more a year. As well, it was mentioned that many people working for minimum wage are holding down more than one job, which in turns affects students trying to enter the job market. It was also mentioned the trickle-down effect of having so many people working for minimum wage that other areas of our community, such as charities and other businesses, suffer since people don’t have disposable income to donate or spend.

Q- Good, well-paying jobs are what will drive our economy and the needed revenue for the government. Small businesses cringe when governments start to talk about raising the minimum wage, because always, government never has a plan to pay for it and saddle the small business with this expense. It leads to part-time jobs instead of full-time, and in the end, it hurts our economy because disposable income levels drop. What will your party do to bolster the economy so, willingly, businesses raise their employees’ wages?

- **What qualifies you for this job?** This perhaps is the most important question of all. It was mentioned that it was common for most politicians to have a career in law, or even finance. However, this has clearly changed over time which the group agreed wasn't necessarily a bad thing as long as the politician had common sense. However, the issue was raised that the majority of jobs require people to have prerequisites so why not politicians? This was outlined extensively in a discussion surrounding the appointment of ministers to a particular portfolio and how they must rely on the expertise of a Deputy Minister for support. However, it was suggested that bureaucracy that surrounds these appointments can often impede the political process, leaving the appointed minister almost helpless to accomplish any sort of a mandate.

Q- What would you say qualifies you for this position. The days have gone where a finance or law degree automatically qualifies a person. But most jobs in today's society require prerequisites to the position sought. It seems, most rely on the Deputy Minister's expertise, when in fact what the electorate is looking for is their voice through you. How could your party change that? What skills do you possess that would make a difference?