

DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

July 2, 2009

Politics

Cautious optimism for Ontario's new Tory chief

VINCE VERSACE

staff writer

The election of Tim Hudak as new leader of the provincial Progressive Conservatives has been received with cautious optimism by some construction associations.

"In the past we have seen leaders with a lot of grassroots support lose those connections as they move up. We will have to wait and see whether or not that happens here," says Frank Zechner, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association.

"We had discussions with him before about the many issues our industry is facing."

Hudak recently won the Tory leadership on the third ballot, defeating Frank Klees by 962 electoral votes. Randy Hillier and Christine Elliott also ran for the leadership. Hillier, an electrician and former member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, was the first to be eliminated in the race and Elliott was dropped after the second ballot.

Hudak, a fourth-term MPP, is a former critic for the provincial public infrastructure renewal portfolio.

He is an MPP for Niagara West-Glanbrook.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, found Hudak to be an eager and conscientious MPP through their past interactions.

"We have found him to have a great understanding about construction and the regulatory challenges we face," says Manahan.

Hudak was elected as an MPP at the age of 27 in 1995 and was considered a rising star under former premier Mike Harris. Over the last 14 years he has been parliamentary assistant to the health minister and held the ministerial portfolios of Northern Development and Mining, Tourism, Culture and Recreation, and Consumer and Business Services.

"I have known Tim for a long time and always thought he was a very frank, open and honest person," says Clive Thurston, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA).

Thurston says he looks forward to meeting with Hudak to discuss the issues and challenges facing not just the OGCA but also construction.

The OGCA president has met with Hudak before concerning infrastructure and industry issues.

Hudak succeeds interim leader Bob Runciman who assumed the leadership after John Tory resigned in March. The new Tory leader has announced that Blair McCreadie, past PC Party president, will lead his

transition team.