

‘The party wants this riding very badly’: at least 22 candidates consider run for Tory nomination in Liberal-held riding of Pickering-Uxbridge, Ont.

by Abbas Rana, The HILL TIMES



The Greater Toronto Area riding is a target for the Conservatives in the next election, say potential candidates Anthony Yacub and Raveenie Rajasinghdm . [sic]

The Liberals have won the riding of Pickering-Uxbridge, Ont. with double digit margins in the last three elections, but the Conservatives are bullish in bringing it to the blue column, with 22 potential candidates asking for nomination papers from the central party office.

“It’s a very winnable riding, especially if the Conservatives form government,” said Anthony Yacub, the Conservative riding association president, who is himself seeking the party’s nomination. “Also, Pickering is known to have the highest number of seniors. So, a lot of people curtail [sic] their message to housing affordability and seniors. In a federal election, there’s a lot of independent minds that are accessible voters.”

The nomination process

Yacub said that as of last week, 22 potential candidates have expressed interest in seeking the nomination in this Greater Toronto Area riding, adding that more people could also request nomination papers from the party. After candidates file their papers, they have to go through the green-lighting process where the party conducts a rigorous check to determine if there’s anything in a candidates’ background that rival parties could use against them in the next election. All parties undertake intense vetting of candidates to avoid the risk of a negative story leaking during an election campaign. Those issues can become national stories and put the party on the defensive.



Anthony Yacub, 24, is the Conservative riding association president in Pickering-Uxbridge, Ont. He has taken a leave of absence as riding president to seek his party's nomination in the riding.

It remains to be seen how many of the 22 candidates actually submit the detailed nomination papers, and how many successfully complete the vetting process. Only green-lit candidates will end up on the ballot paper for the nomination election.

Ranked ballot process

The Conservatives are using the ranked or preferential ballot system for the nomination election. Under this system, riding association members will rank all candidates in order of preference. If none of the candidates wins 50 percent plus one of the votes after the first ballot, the ballots belonging to the candidate who ranked last are eliminated, and their votes will go to the remaining candidates. This process continues until one of the candidates receives the majority of the vote. Members cast their vote only once, but ballots continue to be redistributed by dropping the last-place finisher until a clear winner emerges.



Pickering-Uxbridge riding history

Pickering-Uxbridge's MP, three-term Liberal Jennifer O'Connell, was not available for an interview last week. O'Connell, who is parliamentary secretary to the public safety, democratic institutions and intergovernmental affairs minister, won the riding in 2015 from Conservative MP Corneliu Chisu, winning 50 per cent of the votes to Chisu's 38 per cent. In 2019, the incumbent Liberal MP garnered 51 per cent of the vote, and the Conservatives won 29 per cent. But in the 2021 election, the Liberal vote share went down to 46.9 per cent, while the Conservative share rose to 36.1 per cent.

Chisu represented the riding from 2011 to 2015. He won the riding in 2011 by defeating long-time Liberal MP Dan McTeague by a margin of 2.6 per cent. McTeague represented the riding from 1993 to 2011. The 2011 election was the worst in the Liberal Party's history when, for the first time, they were the third-place party in the House. In that election, the Conservatives under Stephen Harper won a majority government, and the NDP became the official opposition for the first—and so far only—time.

Polls snapshot

Currently, all national public opinion polls are showing that the Conservatives under leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) are ahead of the Liberals with a double-digit margin. According to polling aggregator 338Canada.com, if an election were to happen now, the Conservatives would get 41 per cent of the vote, the Liberals 27 per cent, the NDP 18 per cent, the Bloc Québécois seven per cent, the Greens four per cent, and the People's Party three per cent. Under this scenario, the Conservatives would win a majority government. Based on these numbers, the Conservatives would win between 170-226 seats, the Liberals 58-113 seats, the Bloc 23-36 seats, the NDP 12-34 seats, and the Greens one to three seats.



Corneliu Chisu represented the riding of Pickering-Uxbridge as a Conservative MP from 2011 to 2015.

The same aggregator is also projecting the riding of Pickering-Uxbridge as a likely Conservative gain.

Meanwhile, Yacub, who is a psychotherapist, told The Hill Times that for the duration of the nomination election, he has taken a leave of absence from his responsibilities as the riding president. Prior to working as a therapist, Yacub worked for a bank, but was let go of his job during the COVID-19 pandemic for

refusing to disclose whether he was vaccinated. He told The Hill Times that it was his personal choice not to get vaccinated because he was worried about potential side effects.

“I was a young, in-shape, healthy guy, I play basketball,” said Yacub. “And I have never seen in my life the government mobilized to the degree that it did for this cause because we've had humanitarian crises in the past, we've had homeless people on the street, we have drug-addicted people in downtown Toronto. And I said to myself, 'I don't want to be the first guy.' I respect individual choice, if you want to take the vaccine, take the vaccine. But for me, in my particular moment in time, I have another 80 years ahead in my life, I don't want to see a side effect come along, like mesothelioma or something like that, that I see on television.”

Vaccine mandates were one of the key election issues in the 2021 federal election. The Liberals used it as a wedge issue which worked to their advantage, and they were re-elected to a third mandate.



Raveenie Rajasingham, a cardiac diagnostic specialist who is also a potential candidate in the riding, said that Pickering-Uxbridge is a swing riding and, based on the national polling numbers, the Conservatives are likely to win it. She’s currently in the process of filling out her nomination papers, and will submit them in the coming days.

Raveenie Rajasingham, a cardiac diagnostic specialist, is seeking the Conservative party nomination in Pickering-Uxbridge, Ont.

“Things have changed. What started eight years ago to now—even the last three years—you've probably seen by the polls,” said Rajasingham, who is the president of the Canadian Tamil Congress.

“Liberals are doing so bad [*sic*], and this may be a time for a change for a lot of people, and Pickering will be a riding that's going to change that.”

Frank McMillan, a former riding association president, said that he did not know that so many potential candidates had expressed interest in seeking the Conservative nomination in this riding. He predicted that the final number of candidates who will end up on the ballot will be a lot fewer than 22, chiefly because a majority may not be able to fulfil [*sic*] all the requirements and steps involved in the vetting process. McMillan, who is supporting Rajasingham, said that even though the Conservatives have carried this riding only once in 30 years, the change in electoral boundaries, population demographics, and most importantly, the Liberal unpopularity amongst Canadians, the party is highly likely to win next time around.

“The party wants this riding very badly,” said McMillan. “It’s a very multicultural riding which is very good. Everybody around here gets along very well. This is not a riding where there’s a lot of fighting going on usually.”