

Lecce wins second consecutive term as Blue Tidal Wave sweeps Conservatives to historic victory

By Jim Stewart

King-Vaughan MPP Stephen Lecce cruised to victory on Thursday night, much to the delight of hundreds of supporters who gathered at the Premier Place Banquet Hall in Concord for an opulent victory party. Lecce's easy electoral win ??during which he defeated Liberal candidate Gillian Vivona by over 16,000 votes ??was part of an historic 'Blue Tidal Wave' that swept Doug Ford and the Conservatives to their third consecutive majority government. No party has won three majorities in a row in Ontario since 1959. The results from King-Vaughan were delayed until after 11 p.m. on Election Night ??one of nine ridings across Ontario that experienced glitches in the reporting process. The glitches delayed Minister Lecce's victory speech at Premier Place where hundreds of vocal supporters displayed the patience of saints as the King-Vaughan riding results failed to show on the CP24 News Ticker on monitors above centre stage at the banquet hall. The sumptuous victory buffet was opened to celebrants at 8:44 with the soulful and soothing strains of Sade's 'Your Love is King, Hang on to Your Love,' 'Smooth Operator,' and 'Jezebel' offering background lyrics meshing nicely with the unfolding political events of the evening. Despite the melodic soundtrack, the results from King-Vaughan remained elusive to the party-goers who mingled freely with Lecce and his handlers. The affable former Minister of Education posed for photos with hundreds of his supporters while his campaign team worked to secure data from Elections Ontario. The CTV Decision Desk projected a Conservative majority at 9:07 p.m., eliciting much cheering from the confident and partisan crowd assembled. The rout was confirmed three minutes later when CTV's 'Seats and Vote Share' table revealed the Blue Tidal Wave with the Conservatives leading or ahead in 79 ridings (44%) with the NDP and Liberals leading or ahead in only 24 (18%) and 13 (29%) ridings, respectively. The Green Party led in 2 ridings ??garnering 5% of the vote. At 10:33 p.m. Lecce's campaign manager reassured the milling crowd that the King-Vaughan incumbent had, indeed, rolled to 'a decisive win by capturing over 60% of the votes.'

With victory confirmed unofficially by Elections Ontario, the telegenic manager invited Lecce to the stage, festooned with blue and silver balloons and framed with provincial and national flags as well as 14 blue posters on either side of the lectern that read 'Canada Is Not For Sale.' The ebullient Minister shook hands with dozens of ecstatic supporters before ascending the dais to deliver his victory speech with a giant Canadian flag serving as backdrop, reflective of surging patriotism across the country in light of Donald Trump's existential threats to Canada's sovereignty. The Minister of Energy and Electrification thanked those gathered and focused his gratitude on his family, especially after 'celebrating his grandmother's 100th birthday.' Lecce thanked her for 'instilling values in me.' He also thanked his campaign team ??'an impressive, hard-working group. They made this campaign meaningful. Thank you for believing in me and for standing up for this amazing country.' Lecce noted that 'this election was about the future of this country's sovereignty. I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and do the hard work required to protect Canada.' He reiterated that 'Canada is not for sale' and congratulated 'Premier Ford for his leadership and for fighting for this country.' The Minister of Energy also thanked 'all candidates who ran in this riding,' but the gracious remark elicited no response from the partisan group. Lecce noted in closing that 'being elected a second time and serving in Cabinet is a Canadian dream come true' and, with the timeless lyrics of Queen's 'We are the Champions' playing in the background, he exited the stage. Lecce waded into the adoring throng and posed for photos as the music transitioned to 'Celebrate' by Kool and the Gang. Happy Conservatives bobbed blue signs to the beat and reveled in their total beatdown electoral victory. Local dignitaries, who dropped in to congratulate Minister Lecce, included King Mayor Steve Pellegrini and Councillor David Boyd. According to Elections Ontario, the unofficial final results of the Thursday's snap winter election showed the dominance of Lecce in the King-Vaughan riding. Lecce garnered 28,529 (64.18%) of the ballots cast and won by 16,077 votes over second-place finisher Gillian Vivona of the Liberal Party. Vivona captured a 28.01% vote share, based on the 12,452 ballots cast for the Grits. Rick Morelli of the NDP finished a distant third with 1,714 votes (3.86%). Anne Raney of the Green Party, Christopher Bressi of the New Blue Party, and Maria Morgis of the Ontario Party collected 933 (2.1%), 569 (1.28%), and 256 (0.58%) votes, respectively. Only 39.97% of eligible voters in King-Vaughan cast ballots at the riding's polling stations and at advance polls, a disturbing downward trend in electoral participation. Over 60% of the riding's eligible voters decided to sit this one out.