

## River rush

### Baird pledges \$13M for Ottawa River as Liberals try to pick candidate to run against him

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With the country poised on the edge of a federal election campaign, the race that many expect to be the most hotly contested in the Ottawa region is definitely heating up.

Environment Minister John Baird was front and centre Tuesday with another \$13 million intended to help clean up the City of Ottawa's sewer system.

The race in his Ottawa West- Nepean riding will be the focus of keen attention, but much depends on the Liberals' choice to run against the veteran Tory politician.

One piece of that puzzle was answered Tuesday when it became apparent that former Ottawa mayor Bob Chiarelli is not seeking the Liberal nomination in Ottawa-West Nepean, according to the riding association's president, Chris Dodd.

"Bob is not a candidate," Mr. Dodd said yesterday, adding he spoke with Mr. Chiarelli by telephone Monday afternoon. The Citizen was unable to reach Mr. Chiarelli to confirm Mr. Dodd's assertion. Mr. Chiarelli, who also served previously as an Ottawa West Liberal MPP, was rumoured as a possible candidate.

Mr. Dodd said Mr. Chiarelli indicated he will support former Liberal defence minister and Nepean-Carleton MP David Pratt.

Mr. Baird's announcement Tuesday is on top of a previous federal commitment to spend \$20 million to help stop sewage from entering the Ottawa River from the city's outdated system.

"Reports of raw sewage being dumped into the Ottawa River and secondary untreated sewage going into the Ottawa River has been a huge concern for residents of Ottawa as report after report after report has come out over the last six months," said Mr. Baird at a news conference at Petrie Island.

Sewage overflows into the Ottawa River have become a major issue following the revelation that a massive spill caused by malfunctioning equipment in 2006 was not disclosed to city council or to the Ontario government.



CREDIT:

John Baird on Tuesday announced \$13 million dollars - in addition to the \$20 million already pledged by the federal government - to clean up the Ottawa River.

Ottawa officials have said the cost of fixing the problem - which would involve separating storm and sanitary sewers - could be \$600 million.

The federal announcement follows a provincial commitment last week to give Ottawa \$77.2 million, money it hopes the city will use to fix sewer problems.

As for the federal investment, Mr. Baird said: "If we wanted to spend two or three years developing a 50-year plan for the Ottawa River, we can do that.

"But I think what people in Ottawa want to do is see real action and immediate action, and I guess we are making a major downpayment on that action today."

Mr. Baird also said the city can't be expected to tackle the problem alone and needed support from the federal and the provincial governments.

"We didn't get into this mess overnight and we certainly won't get out overnight," said Mr. Baird, who was joined by Ottawa-Orléans MP Royal Galipeau.

Alta Vista Councillor Peter Hume said funding from senior levels of government is always welcome.

"Everyone recognizes that cleaning up the Ottawa River, whether it is sewage or the other problems the river has, is a long-term project," said Mr. Hume, who is also chairman of the planning and environment committee. "But additional money, bringing this to \$33 million, certainly allows us to be much more aggressive in what we can do."

About \$3 million of the federal amount is expected to go toward the \$9.9-million Fleet Street regulator project, which would create a reservoir that would help eliminate flows to the Ottawa River through the Fleet Street tailrace, he said.

Mayor Larry O'Brien also welcomed the news of the additional \$13 million.

"This announcement is a demonstration of the shared responsibility from all levels of government that fixing our sewers and protecting the Ottawa River is a priority," Mr. O'Brien said in a statement.

The environment minister's record will be the target of the Liberals' pick for the Ottawa West-Nepean race.

Along with Mr. Pratt, who announced his interest this summer, Adriano Guzzo and Nour El Kadri are seeking the nomination.

Mr. Dodd said the riding association executive met Monday night to decide how to proceed.

The three declared candidates were each given 10 minutes with the executive.

Following a long discussion, Mr. Dodd said the executive came up with a recommendation that he passed to the Liberal party Tuesday.

Liberal Senator David Smith, who also acts as the party's campaign co-chairman, said riding associations can invite the party leader to appoint a preferred candidate and avoid a nomination process.

"Before the leader exercises that prerogative, you certainly want to know what the riding association executive thinks."

Mr. Dodd declined to discuss the details of "party internal" business.

He said he did not know how long it will take to get a response from the party, but speculated it could come today.

He added he supports the executive's recommendation, which was not unanimous.

When asked about the current nomination process - which has yet to include an open nomination meeting for riding association members - Mr. Dodd said the actions of Prime Minister Stephen Harper have forced the riding association to act quickly.

"In light of the fact that we have a prime minister who has broken his word and is forcing us into a needless election, we have no choice but to try to adapt to this changing situation," he sai

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