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Toronto election win — his lifetime's ambition — never taken for granted by John Tory

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Even with every poll showing him ahead, even with every pundit predicting his win, John Tory didn't stop. In the final days of the campaign, Mr. Tory blitzed the city, hitting all 44 Toronto wards in 48 hours.

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After losses in 2003 and 2007 and 2009, he couldn't stop, not yet, not until he knew for sure, not until the ballots were counted, not until the media decision desks made their calls.

For a time Monday night, it was much closer than many predicted. When the first big batch of results came in, Mr. Tory led Mr. Ford by about 20,000 votes — a significant gap, but not a huge one.

At his party at the Liberty Grand events centre, the crowd seemed almost subdued. A collective sense of unease hung over the long, rectangular ballroom. It was as if hundreds of people were suddenly, simultaneously saying the same question: this couldn't really be happening, could it?



Then slowly, Mr. Tory pulled away. By the time Mr. Tory walked to the stage, through a crowd of cheering supporters, his large, lopsided grin was evidence of the win he finally had.

He finished with about the 40% of the vote amid massive turnout. Doug Ford finished in second place, at about 34%. Olivia Chow finished with 23% of the vote.

John Tory is the next mayor of Toronto. At 60, Mr. Tory finally made a lifetime's ambition come true.

"The people have spoken and tonight we begin the work of building one Toronto," Mr. Tory told supporters.

"Torontonians want to see an end to the divisions that have paralyzed city hall for the last few years. I hear you."

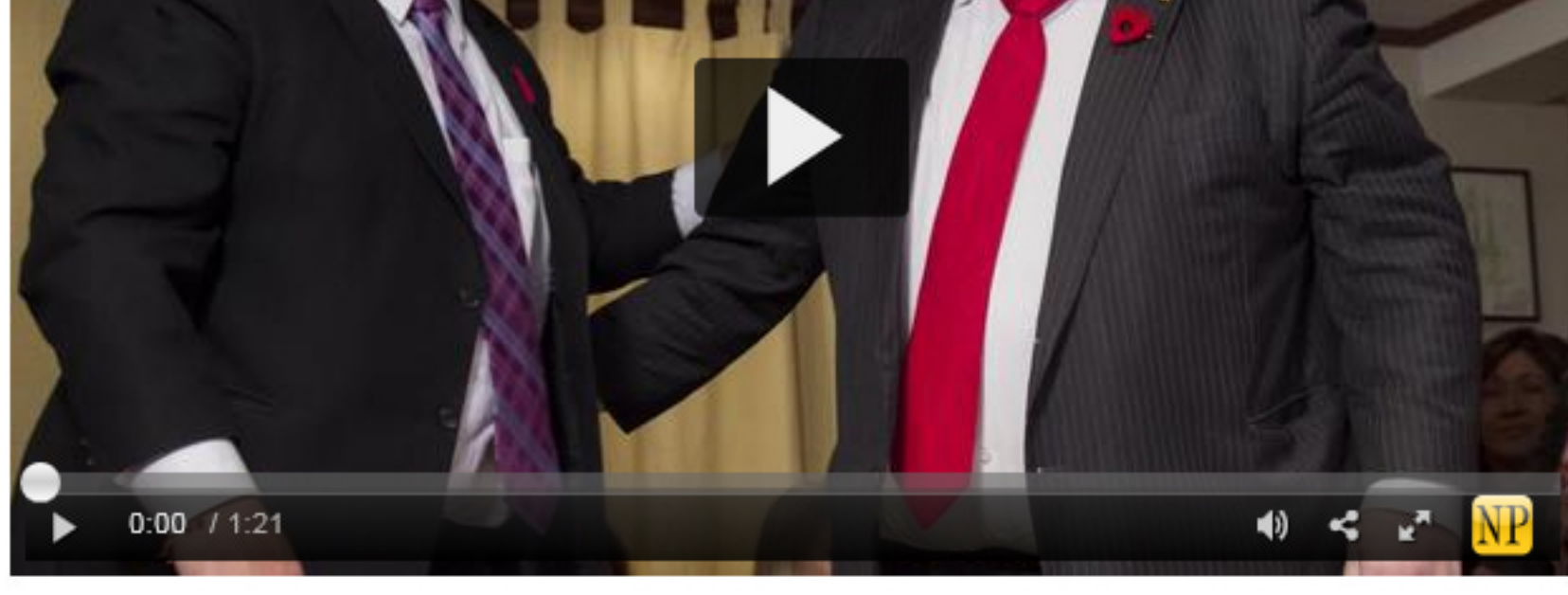
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The victory came at the end of a grueling, almost endless campaign. He declared for the mayoralty in February. For more than eight months he sat through debates. He watched one opponent, Rob Ford, go to rehab then drop out entirely. He trailed the other, Olivia Chow until well past the spring. When fall came, it brought a new foe: Doug Ford, the mayor's brother, who launched a six week blitzkrieg on Mr. Tory's record in business, politics and life.

But in his victory speech, Mr. Tory tried to move past that. "That was one long and tough campaign," he said, before ad libbing a joke about having more debates.

"Without a doubt, there were some differences and many debates on the issues among all the candidates in the last few months. Those debates and those conversations were and are necessary, but it's not now time to come together. It's time to unite as one city and one Toronto."



John Tory celebrates with wife Barbara at The Liberty Grand after winning the 2014 Toronto election. Peter J. Thompson/National Post

About 1.6 million city residents were eligible to vote at 1,679 polling stations. Preliminary figures indicated more than 60% turned out to vote — well above the 50% who cast ballots in 2010.

It marked Mr. Tory's second attempt to secure Toronto's top job. The mayoral bid he launched in 2003 saw him come within 5% of victory but ultimately fall short of the left-leaning David Miller.

He used that near-victory as a springboard to the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, but both he and the PCs were defeated in the 2007 election — a loss widely attributed to Mr. Tory's proposal to fund faith-based schools. He gave up the party leadership in 2009 after failing to regain a seat in the legislature.

Mr. Tory spent the ensuing years as a radio broadcaster and community activist, but he said he felt the need to make more of an impact in shaping the public agenda and bringing about lasting change.



Doug Ford, left, and Rob Ford embrace after receiving election results at their mothers home on election night in Toronto, Ontario, Monday October 27, 2014. Tyler Anderson/National Post

That drive is what lured him back to the hurly-burly of political life, he said, adding that its benefits outweigh the harsh lessons he's been forced to learn.

"I was a broadcaster doing a very popular talk show where I know you have some degree of ability to influence things, I have been a public servant, I have been a business figure," Mr. Tory said in an interview.

"There is no place you make a bigger difference to build up your own city or your own province or your own community than to be in public life. So to me it's public service."

On Monday night, after his speech, Mr. Tory's large, extended family crowded around him on stage. Then, almost before the crowd knew what was happening, he was gone, hustled off the stage and out of the ballroom. He wouldn't speak to the media Monday night. That would have to wait for Tuesday, when the glow of victory had faded and difficult reality of governing Toronto has begun to sink in.