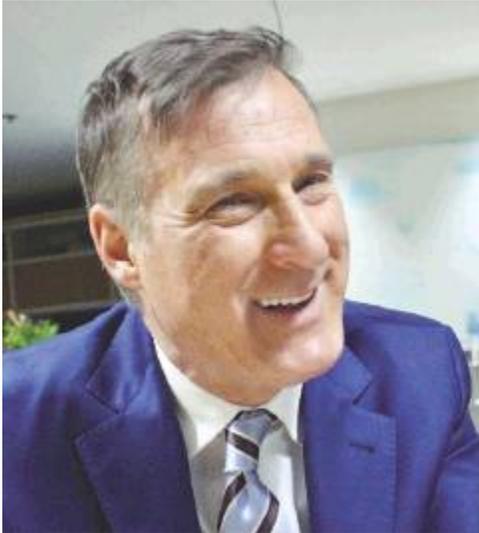


# Bernier heads to N.B. preaching pipelines

ADAM HURAS PARLIAMENT HILL



Maxime Bernier

OTTAWA • Maxime Bernier is coming to New Brunswick, where he plans to promise to force an oil pipeline through his own home province of Quebec.

He'll also pitch a call to drastically cut back on immigration and pledge to slash equalization payments, he says.

Bernier has a speech and a rally planned in Saint John next week, part of an eastern tour that will also include a rally in Halifax.

He will deliver a lunchtime speech on Jan. 17 titled "Reconciling east and west with the right economic policies," hosted by the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce at the Hilton Hotel. The hotel will also host a rally later that night.

In an interview Tuesday, Bernier said his upstart right-wing populist federal political party - the People's Party of Canada - prides itself on "finally discussing the real issues," and will shy away from none of them in his Saint John stop.

New Brunswick is home to voters ripe to support him, having already registered disinterest in a last provincial election in a system dominated by Conservatives and Liberals, he said.

"It was good news that the Green and the People's Alliance (won three seats each in the September provincial election)," Bernier said. "What it's showing me is that people are ready to vote for new parties."

The party aims to field candidates in all 10 New Brunswick federal ridings, though none have been named. It also aims to compete in all 338 ridings across the country for the looming October federal election in efforts to see Bernier included in nationally televised debates.

People's Party of Canada executive director Clinton Desveaux told Brunswick News that an analysis by the party suggests they can be factors in a number of the province's southern ridings, specifically Saint John-Rothesay, New Brunswick Southwest, Fundy Royal, Tobique Mactaquac and Fredericton.

A part of that is support for TransCanada's failed Energy East pipeline.

Bernier said he recently appeared on a Quebec TV news panel to say that his home province can't stand in the way of an oil pipeline in the national interest.

"I say the same thing in Quebec as I will say in New Brunswick," Bernier said. "The federal government has an obligation to do some consultation, but after that it's 100 per cent federal jurisdiction, and yes, I say go ahead."

Bernier contends that Ottawa has constitutional powers to push the project ahead.

“It’s only the politicians in Quebec that are against it,” whereas Quebecers know it’s safer to transport oil by pipeline instead of rail, he said.

Bernier said his speech will also bring up a potentially controversial call to roll back federal equalization transfers.

He’ll also pitch to stop transfers to fund provincial health care, exchanging that for a system that would give tax points to provinces so they can collect their own health revenues. That could dramatically affect New Brunswick, with total transfers now covering roughly a third of all provincial government spending.

Ottawa will transfer \$3.157 billion over the next fiscal year through health, social services and equalization payments to the province.

But Bernier argues that there is currently no incentive for have-not provinces to develop their natural resources, again pointing to his home province of Quebec, which will receive \$13 billion from the program this year while opposing energy projects.

“The equalization formula, it’s like a welfare trap,” he said.

New Brunswick economists and demographers have argued that New Brunswick may need even larger transfers as the population ages and health care costs climb, with fewer young people living in the region.

Bernier said he would gradually “phase out” the transfers, to eliminate any shock.

Meanwhile, the party is also proposing to slash the number of immigrants to Canada by more than 40 per cent from the Liberal government’s current target of 330,000 people in 2019.

He said the focus needs to be returned to economic immigrants - and not refugees.

“For the first time in years, or even decades, we’re finally debating the issues that matter to Canadians,” Bernier said in a letter to party membership at the turn of the calendar year. “Issues that the old-line parties did not want to touch for fear of angering some political clientele or special interest groups.”

Bernier said the trip to Saint John will underline that.

“We don’t try to please everybody,” he said. “We have policies that are good for the people (as a whole.)”