

Former MP Sinclair Stevens dies at 89

By Bill Rea

Sinclair Stevens, former Member of Parliament and minister in two Progressive Conservative governments, is dead.

Mr. Stevens died unexpectedly November 30 after suffering a severe heart attack at his King Township home. He was 89.

"It was very unexpected," his wife Noreen said. "He had been active up until the day before."

He was first elected to the House of Commons in the 1972 election as a Progressive Conservative in the riding of York-Simcoe. Mr. Stevens ran as a candidate in the 1976 Progressive Conservative leadership convention. He finished seventh on the first ballot, and withdrew in favour of the eventual victor Joe Clark. He served as President of the Treasury Board in the short-lived Clark government.

Mr. Stevens was handily re-elected as the Member for York-Peel in the 1984 general election that saw the Progressive Conservatives under Brian Mulroney sweep to power.

He was named Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion in the new government, but resigned in 1986 when conflict of interest allegations were raised against him.

A lengthy public inquiry concluded he had been in conflict.

Mr. Stevens had been nominated by the Tories in a newly-created riding to run in the 1988 campaign, but Mulroney refused to sign his nomination papers and he left Parliament.

There was vindication in 2004 when a Federal Court judge overturned the inquiry report.

The Progressive Conservatives merged with the Canadian Alliance in 2003 to form the Conservative Party of Canada. Mr. Stevens was never a fan of that arrangement, nor did he have much use for the new Conservative Leader Stephen Harper. He expressed satisfaction when the Conservatives were defeated by the Justin Trudeau Liberals in 2015.

"I think it was good to get rid of Harper," Mr. Stevens said in an interview a couple of days after the election. "He's very right wing."

"He brought in a lot of things that will have to be undone," he added.

Mr. Stevens was affiliated with the Progressive Canadian Party, which formed after the merger, eventually becoming its president.

"He was always active and interested in politics," Mrs. Stevens said.

Dorian Baxter, who has carried the Progressive Canadian banner in several Newmarket-Aurora elections, and elsewhere, said Stevens' death was "a great loss."

"It is a great loss for our Progressive Canadian party, but an even greater loss for the Canadian political scene in general," said Baxter, one of the Progressive Canadian's highest-profile candidates, who will be representing the party in next month's by-election in Markham-Thornhill. "However, in his departure, he has left us with great inspiration in this 150th anniversary of Confederation under Sir John A. Macdonald."

With files from Brock Weir