

Decision to cross the floor came at "a tipping point," says MP



Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev is pictured with Federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer after crossing the floor from the Liberals on Monday. Photo courtesy of the Conservative Party of Canada

By Brock Weir

She asked herself if she could look her constituents in the face, but also if she could look at herself in the mirror at the end of the day knowing she had done everything she could to represent the interests Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

That is what Member of Parliament Leona Alleslev says played a factor in her surprise decision to cross the floor of the House of Commons on Monday from the Liberal benches to the Conservative Party.

At the time, she said she stood in the House "deeply concerned for the future of the country."

The world, she said, has dramatically changed over the last three years, leading to "fundamental shifts in the global economy while trade relationships, international agreements, and defence structures are under threat" "a "perfect storm" of serious challenges that needs strong leadership.

That, she said, was not on offer in the Liberal Party.

"My attempts to raise my concerns with this government were met with silence," said Ms. Alleslev. "The Government must be challenged openly, and for me to publicly criticize the government as a Liberal would undermine the government according to my code of conduct, [and would] be dishonourable. After careful and deliberate consideration, I announce today that I am withdrawing from the Government benches to take my seat among my Conservative colleagues under the strong leadership of Andrew Scheer." Speaking to The Auroran, Ms. Alleslev says that her primary focus is to represent constituents. During the course of the last Federal election campaign, Ms. Alleslev says she campaigned on structural changes around tax reform, employment reform, foreign policy, and defence. Her work in the House of Commons has included time as Parliamentary Secretary for Procurement with a defence on Defence Procurement, and chairing Canada's delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Association, working on the Defence Committee.

"I have been working for three years inside the tent on all of those things to try and make sure that we honour the commitments we made in the campaign and to bring about some of the really structural and significant changes this country needs," says Ms. Alleslev. There was no one thing that made her think that her advice wasn't being heeded, she adds. Rather, her decision was a cumulative decision based on a number of factors.

"It just builds over time to really you hit a tipping point," says Ms. Alleslev. "It was a combination of the things going on in Canada, and we have talked before on the unprecedented global instability and the significant changes going on around the world. What really happened was all these cumulative things I felt really needed to be addressed. At the same time, as the world [changes] almost rapidly around us, that came to a point where we don't have the luxury of time. I needed to exercise a sense of urgency.

"Ever since I joined the military and I swore my oath to serve and defend the country, I actually ask myself every day if I am doing everything I can. More recently, I was really thinking, I may only have a year left before the next election, so I need to know if I can

look my constituents in the face and look at myself in the mirror and know that while I was here, with that sacred obligation to represent them, did I do absolutely everything in my power to make the changes I committed to them, and that we believe are necessary for Canada at this point in time.?

As a Member of Parliament, Ms. Alleslev says she is the same person today that she was during the election campaign. It is her name on the ballot, she says, and she hopes voters look at the individuals to determine who is best to represent them in Ottawa. ?If that is not the case, then what is the role of a Member of Parliament, if not for an individual going there to represent constituents and do the job they are paid to do? The question is, what is their role as Member of Parliament.?

In joining the Conservative caucus, Ms. Alleslev forewent the option of sitting as an independent for the remainder of her current term in office. Joining the Official Opposition was a decision she says was based on ?certain specific foundational changes that we believe are necessary for the country? including tax reform, employment reform, federal infrastructure, comprehensive foreign policy and defence.

Constituents said these are important issues to them, she says, and she feels the same way.

?I am excited to be part of a team under a leader that also prioritizes those things,? she says. ?I had quite a significant conversation with him (Mr. Scheer) before I made this decision just to ensure that he really was focused on those priorities and I really would have the opportunity to represent my constituents in that way.?

As for the issue of timing, Ms. Alleslev said she hit that tipping point ?in the last couple of months? and she thought in her final year, ?what can I do differently in the next year to make more of an impact.?

It was a ?difficult decision? to change political parties by literally crossing the floor, and ?it is definitely a test of your nerve to stand in the House of Commons and make your kind of speech,? she says, but it is the only way she says it could have been done.

?I believe in the structure of government, I believe in the institution of government, and I believe in the role of government almost independent of political party,? she says. ?We live in a time where Canadians are actually losing confidence in the structure of government, not just the people, but the actual structure of government, to do the greatest good for the greatest number of Canadians, and do what is in the public interest. The role of an opposition is to publicly challenge the Government and hold them to account. The role of the Government is to govern. To tear down a government by criticizing them publicly from within would undermine the Government and would cause citizens to lose confidence in the institution, in democracy, in the structure of our government. That would be wrong.

?We have an incredible structure, so you honour that structure. When you come to a point, for me, as a Member of Parliament, where you need to have a public conversation around the future direction of the country and against the government, then you need to do that from an opposition perspective, not from within the government.?

When asked, however, whether this cycle would begin again should she be re-elected as a Conservative MP next year as a member of a Conservative government and their priorities diverge, she replied, ?That is why I decided to join a leader and a team only after comprehensive conversation to ensure that we are aligned on the policies and the priorities of where we thought the country needed to go.?

HAVE YOUR SAY ? Do you agree with Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev's decision to cross the floor from the Liberals to Conservatives? Send your thoughts to letters@auroran.com.