

Being called a 'traitor' was the hardest part of floor crossing: Alleslev



By Brock Weir

As a former member of the Canadian Armed Forces, being called a 'traitor' after crossing the floor was the toughest part of a tough decision, says Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev.

Ms. Alleslev, who was elected as a Liberal Member of Parliament in Aurora's southern riding began this new year, an election year, as a member of a new party after crossing the floor to the Conservatives on September 17.

Looking back, Ms. Alleslev says 2018 was a year of 'big decision' but her big decision is one she looks back on with a smile because now she feels she is able to do what her constituents asked of her 'and that is 'influence the future shape and direction' of the country.

'I think the country is in one of those points in history where we're facing some big challenges and I didn't feel that we were able to have an open conversation about those big challenges,' Ms. Alleslev tells The Auroran. 'Now, I am in a position to have those candid conversations with my constituents. When they say, 'These are big problems and you're not doing anything,' I can now say, 'Yes, I agree these are the big problems and I am working with the new team to shape how we can address those and what that needs to look like in terms of solutions, whether it is having a conversation in Question Period or at Committee to hold the government to account in terms of shaping as best we can where we are going, or whether that is shaping what a Conservative government would do, were they to win the next election.'

Among those top priority issues, she says, are the economy, increasing competitiveness, and making sure businesses can get their goods to market, whether it is through pipelines, airports and seaports. Defence and security, she says, are also critical going forward, and this includes cybersecurity.

After making her bombshell announcement on September 17, many of Aurora constituents wondered, along with Canadians from further afield, what exactly changed. It was less than two months after Ms. Alleslev welcomed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to the riding at a party fundraiser during which she heaped praise on the Liberal leader.

That very question of 'what changed' is something she says is still 'very difficult' to answer.

'I ran because I felt a sense of urgency and I campaigned on those issues because I felt a sense of urgency,' she says. 'I did everything I could as a Liberal to influence and communicate and advocate from within that sense of urgency. I tried all of my plans and felt that I wasn't making enough progress as quickly as I felt that progress needed to be made. At some point, I looked at it and said, 'I only have a year left and I may or may not get re-elected. That's okay, that's the wonderful thing about our democratic process, but if I don't get elected, can I look in the mirror and know I did everything I possibly could while I was here?' Once that answer was 'no' I had no choice but to do something so I could do the best with the year I had left.'

'There was no one point,' she adds, about what made her come to that realisation, but pressed further, the former Air Force officer says, 'purchasing used F18s' set off alarm bells.

'It was like a cumulation with my project plan. I felt like I was running out of time and therefore at the beginning of that last session, [I felt] I really don't have any other choice. If I am going to serve my constituents and my country the way I said I was going to, and

true to what they told me and what I believe needs to be done, I am running out of time and I better do something with this last year.?

The most difficult part of making that decision, she says, was leaving a team ? both at the national level and at the local riding level. It wasn't about people, she says, and she would still like to consider the people on the other side of the floor ?great friends.?

?I accepted the possibility that I would have no friends or relationships on the old side and that I wouldn't necessarily gain any on the new side because politics, for many, is a team sport and loyalty is to a political party first and not necessarily ideas and the country first,? she says. ?The most rewarding thing was how overwhelmingly welcomed I was by the Conservative party and the Conservative team and right away they wanted my ideas and they wanted me to be a part of shaping the vision of the country and that has been very rewarding. And, of course, to have my entire team come with me, which was the other incredibly rewarding thing. ?The [fact my]whole team came with me didn't surprise me because I am not sure I would have made the decision I made if I didn't have my whole team with me. I can only do what I do because I have an incredible team. If they didn't think it was the right decision it probably wouldn't have been the right decision and I wouldn't have made the decision I made. Because all of them believed it was the right decision and came with me, I knew it was what I had to do and we did it together.?

Next Week: The checklist for which Ms. Alleslev says she was running out of time to finish.