

Alleslev wants conversation on "the things that matter"



By Brock Weir

Being able to have the chance to talk about things that matter is a constant challenge, says Liberal candidate Leona Alleslev.

"What really matters is setting our country up economically, internationally, ethically for the next generation ? not about someone's hair or someone's first name versus their last name," she says. "It's a tactic because if you can get people talking about the things that don't matter, then they won't ask you the tough questions about the things that do. Never underestimate the power and intelligence of Canadians."

An Oak Ridges resident with a proud background as a senior-ranking officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Ms. Alleslev says she decided to enter politics due to her "deep concern with the direction of the country." As Canada looks towards the 150th anniversary of Confederation, this management consultant says she is well versed in travelling the county evaluating companies. As she travelled, however, the country itself did not escape her watchful eye.

"I did that same evaluation of the country, both from the fundamentals of our values, as well as the practical application of our policies and our social infrastructure and all those kinds of things," she says. "I am deeply concerned we're not necessarily leaving the country a better place than how we found it for our children and grandchildren."

"My mission at the moment is to get as many Canadians re-engaged in the conversation and to tell them it matters. My goals are to make sure we all collectively set the direction of the country the way we believe it should be to the best of our ability. Being elected will contribute to that, but even if I am not successful, simply having the conversation with as many people as I have, then hopefully that will have ended up making a small difference in our small corner of the world."

Among Ms. Alleslev's chief concerns are youth employment and, given her military background, re-establishing what she feels is Canada's place in the world.

Canada has a rapidly rising number of unemployed youth, she says, and those who are employed are often under-employed or contract workers with no real job security, no benefits, and no ability to plan for the future. They are living at home, she says, and many of those who aren't have left the country to establish careers and raise families.

"We need those future leaders to be employed today, not only because of the contributions they will make today, but because we need them to be our leaders, innovators, developers, entrepreneurs, 10 years from now," she says. "The government at the moment seems very focused on redistribution of tax money through tax credits, which are a one-time thing, as opposed to building an infrastructure that allows for everyone to have jobs and to grow and prosper over time."

Since she first joined the Air Force, Ms. Alleslev says she has seen Canada's role as 'an honest broker in the world, a strong member of our alliances, our partners and peacekeepers' changed and not for the better. She rejects the Conservative argument it is the best party equipped to handle peace and security 'and it all depends on your definition of both.

'We have to maintain security, there is no question, but we also have to balance it with the values of our society and our individuals and our rule of law,' she says. 'I think it is a very delicate tightrope between the two. I don't believe we need to be as fearful as [Conservative leader Stephen Harper] would have us be, and I think it takes a great deal more courage to be hopeful and to see the opportunities in the world and in our own country than to retreat, entrench, and be afraid.

'As someone with my background, we're always looking for opportunities to have peace so we can avoid war and you do that through understanding other people's perspectives, being part of international alliances that are doing great things for peace, and obviously having the courage and hope to build a better country. Peace and security is absolutely important, but not to such an extent that we're paralyzed with fear, one that allows us to be hopeful and positive.'

And this is a message Ms. Alleslev says she hopes to convey to voters casting their ballots from the south side of Wellington Street, down into the middle of Richmond Hill. Speaking to potential voters, she says she often finds them questioning whether they can actually make a difference and whether lawmakers actually care about their voice.

'Their voice matters and they too can inspire their friends,' she says. 'When they have a group of people all rowing in the same direction, nothing is unachievable. It is resonating, but they really give the impression they haven't had anyone to have that conversation with them, to tell them and inspire them that they can make a difference, and now is their time and it matters. It is a critical impact on our democracy.

'The possibilities are endless. We have great universities, we have great educated people. We have resources, we have so many things that we could leverage to make truly great things, as we have done in the past. I am excited about being able to start to talk to people about those possibilities and believe that we really can make a difference and change our small corner of the world.'

Next week, The Auroran sits down with Newmarket-Aurora's incumbent Conservative candidate, Lois Brown.