

"I was a darned good MP," says Lois Brown



By Brock Weir

"My mum would be so proud of me."

It was a simple, yet emotional statement from Lois Brown, Newmarket-Aurora's outgoing Member of Parliament, which neatly summed up The Auroran's post-election interview with the politician.

It came just days after Ms. Brown lost her re-election bid to Liberal candidate Kyle Peterson, who is soon to be sworn in, and held amidst half-packed boxes and disarray in her constituency office as she packed up after seven years on the job.

It was in this office Ms. Brown said she did the work she is most proud of, helping constituents with a variety of issues, some commonplace and some extraordinary.

"We had a call in April from an immigration lawyer outside my riding and she told me I had a constituent, a young man, who was on life support at Southlake," Ms. Brown recalls. "His parents, who were here 25 years ago, had been deported for their actions and she was trying to get them a visa to come but to no avail. There was no hope, they were essentially just waiting for someone to turn off the machines."

Ms. Brown says she called this man's parents in their home country to say she did not see any hope for them to get a visa but, in the process, found out he had a 19-year-old sister there and she told then-immigration minister Chris Alexander she should not be "tainted" by her parents' activities. That was 9.30 a.m. on a Friday and she was on a plane by 7.30 p.m.

"But, I couldn't live with it," says Ms. Brown. "I called Chris back the next day and said, 'I don't care what they have done. I am putting my reputation on the line here. I am a mother. I cannot fathom having my child dying in another country and not being able to be there.' I got [the visa] and met them at the hospital. There are no votes in it for me, but it was the right thing to do. There are three people in that country of origin who know somebody cared and that is Canada's reputation. Those are the kinds of things I take away from here."

Other cases of which she is particularly proud, she says, is her advocacy work in "harassing" the Ministers of Defence and Veterans Affairs to address the issues of cadets involved with the 1974 blast at CFB Valcartier, following the publication of a book by Aurora's Gerry Fostaty, who was a cadet leader in the incident, her work for allied veterans, and, in particular, her work as Parliamentary Secretary on the file for maternal and child care in the developing world.

'I came back from the South Sudan with a recommendation to the Minister to redirect project money to a hospital in Juba with a nurse's training program [to] double the capacity of the program and we did,' she recalls. 'We are accomplishing precisely what we set out to do because now we have frontline healthcare workers out in those remote places where vulnerable women die in childbirth from preventable causes. We have taken the expertise and the equipment and we are saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and millions of children. I take that as my legacy because I helped make those decisions.

'It has been an awesome privilege and my only regret is I don't get to do more.'

So, where did the campaign go wrong? Ms. Brown is yet to join the chorus of the myriad Conservatives criticizing their party's Federal campaign strategy. That is a question, she says, for another day and 'I am just not ready to go there.' The first step, she says, is to sit down with her campaign team and do their analysis before looking at the big picture.

'I think we were a little dismayed,' she says, of what was going through her mind as she watched election results roll in last Monday night. 'We watched what happened in the East Coast and to see that tsunami that was happening I think was concerning.'

But, what does she attribute it to?

'At the risk of going against Mark Twain who said never pick a fight with people who buy ink by the barrel, I honestly believe the media eviscerated Prime Minister Harper,' she says. 'When people would say to me, 'I hate your leader,' my question back was, 'what has be done except put money back in your pocket?' It is the media who have eviscerated a man who I believe is going to go down in history as one of the finest Prime Ministers we have ever had.'

Ms. Brown said she had the opportunity to work with him on the party's national council several years before being elected as an MP and found Mr. Harper to be 'a man who comes from humble means,' a 'self-made man' and one who has a 'vision for what this country could be on the national stage.'

'I think it is unconscionable,' says Ms. Brown of the 'media's evisceration' of Mr. Harper. 'If there was one thing I was trained as a child, one thing my parents taught me, is regardless of whether or not you like a person, you respect them. I believe the media has created such disrespect for the office of the Prime Minister. I am appalled. I am appalled! I don't know how else to say that.'

At the end of the day, Ms. Brown says this election was a rewarding experience. There was undeniably a different feeling in the air this time around, she says, but the number of friends and supporters she found in the process was rewarding.

'I honestly believe I am leaving behind a reputation that is unsullied and that people in this area know we worked very hard on their behalf,' she says.