

Brown and Klees remember friend and mentor in Jim Flaherty

By Brock Weir

Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown is mourning a 'mentor' in former cabinet minister Jim Flaherty.

Mr. Flaherty, who served as Canada's Finance Minister from 2006 until his resignation just under a month ago, died at his Ottawa home early Thursday afternoon.

Flags were lowered across the country, including at Aurora Town Hall, in his honour as friends and colleagues grappled with what they described as a shocking and sudden loss.

'I am shocked and saddened,' Ms. Brown tells The Auroran. 'I have known Jim for more than two decades through involvement in provincial politics and watched him closely when he was Finance Minister in Ontario.'

As Ms. Brown herself eyed becoming involved in the Federal level, after Mr. Flaherty too made the leap from Queen's Park to the House of Commons, she says she found considerable encouragement and support in him.

'He was always a mentor,' she says. 'For many of us who were part of the Conservative family, and who were looking at a political career, he was very generous with his time and his mentorship in how to go about being elected. He was so generous with his time that as a cabinet minister he got to as many of the ridings as he possibly could where new candidates were running.'

Once elected, Ms. Brown says she recalls the many meetings Mr. Flaherty had with MPs as he worked on the Federal Budget. Each had a list of suggestions and Ms. Brown was no exception.

'A couple of times he looked at me and said, 'Lois, I am not sure we can do that right now, but that is out of the box thinking and I like out of the box thinking!'' she says. 'We regularly had those conversations and now that we are heading back towards a balanced budget next year, which I honestly believe is going to be a Jim Flaherty budget, I think we all recognize that this will be his crowning glory.'

While Ms. Brown is looking ahead to the impacts Mr. Flaherty's legacy will leave with his successor, Joe Oliver, his legacy can also be seen close to home, particularly in financial support he provided on behalf of the Federal Government towards the restoration of the Church Street School in 2007, which was to become the Aurora Cultural Centre.

'That is part of the legacy he leaves for our community,' she says. 'I believe Jim Flaherty's legacy is a strong and prosperous Canada that he has left for generations to come.'

This is a view shared by MPP Frank Klees, who said his 'steady hand on the rudder' of the economy helped Canada 'weather' a very difficult economic storm.

Their ties ran deeper than simple party politics. Having been elected together in 1995, they served on the same side of the Legislature, worked together at the cabinet table and then faced off against each other in the 2004 leadership race, which also featured John Tory.

'You really get to know somebody when you are in close quarters for an extended period of time, often in heated debate on issues,' said Mr. Klees. 'I came to respect Jim over the course of serving together and also especially in the course of that leadership campaign because regardless of how heated the debate became, there was always a coming back together as friends and colleagues.'

'He had the ability to disagree but at the end of the day had the ability to maintain a friendship and trust relationship. He's a man who is going to be dearly missed.'

While praise was heaped on Mr. Flaherty for his handling of the economic downturn, one thing lost in the discussion, added Mr. Klees, was the support Mr. Flaherty and his wife, Christine Elliott, had for vulnerable Canadians, something that can be seen in their support for the Abilities Centre in Whitby which provides