

Conservative leader picks Alleslev as deputy



Conservative leader Andrew Scheer has tapped Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev to be his second-in-command as the party prepares to return to the House of Commons as the Official Opposition.

Her appointment, along with the rest of the Conservative Shadow Cabinet, was announced in Ottawa on Thursday morning.

Ms. Alleslev, who crossed the floor from the Liberals to the Conservatives in September 2018, said it was an "honour" and a "privilege" to be selected to help steer the party in this minority government, stating that the top priorities on the table include tackling the economy, addressing national unity, and building international relations.

"I asked [Scheer] for his perspective," says Ms. Alleslev when asked what she saw as her mandate in the role. "Ultimately a Deputy Leader is to be the right-hand-man to the leader, so it is really around how I can best support him in the role and how he wants to divide up the responsibilities. We're the Official Opposition and we're in a minority government, and Canadians sent a clear message that there is work to do and the economy, national unity, international relations are on the top of mind. So, with my caucus colleagues and my shadow cabinet colleagues and the leadership team, we need to be holding this government to account and we need to be doing what Canadians have sent us here to do - that is to shape the future direction of the nation in a way that Canada can prosper."

Her new appointment, however, got off to a rocky start at the end of last week when Ms. Alleslev issued an apology for comments made during a CBC interview when, after being asked about her opinion on Mr. Scheer not participating in a Pride parade, she likened such events to a St. Patrick's Day parade.

The comments caused controversy and by Saturday afternoon she issued an apology on social media, stating: "I would like to sincerely apologize for a comment I made on CBC's The House. Pride parades represent a wonderful celebration of the LGBTQ community and are an important symbol in the fight for LGBTQ rights."

Nevertheless, Ms. Alleslev was ready to hit the ground running speaking to The Auroran just over 24 hours after her appointment, determined to make inroads for the party within Ontario and tackling the issue of western alienation noted in last month's election results, an issue over which she expressed a great deal of concern during the Federal Election campaign.

"The Leader has asked me to travel the country and make sure we hear from Canadians across the country and understand what [is] really the basis of discontent and what specific actions [can we] take to be able to influence the government to unite the country," she says. "We're stronger together. The greatest threats to Canada right now, in my mind, are external and we are always, for 150 years, better together. We're going to have to figure out how to value each aspect of Canada and leverage every asset that we have because I am concerned that things are going to get a little bit tougher before they get better."

"There is no question that we're not going to form a majority government without Ontario and where we need to communicate better, or listen better, or align better with the needs of Canadians is in the GTA " and being from the GTA and being from Ontario, I am pretty sure that was one of the clear messages the Leader wanted to send to that Region in appointing me that, yes, I have a seat at the table, and that's the strong voice I am looking to bring."

In bringing that voice to the table, she is backed by a driving philosophy of always getting "the best information and understanding the lay of the land." She says she keeps in mind a piece of philosophy handed down from her grandmother: "make haste slowly."

"You want to make change and you want to do things to make a difference, but you want to do it calmly and from an informed perspective," says Ms. Alleslev. "So, the Conservative party is doing an external review right now and there's lots of people who are saying lots of things, but ultimately they are making, in my opinion, a rush to judgement before they have all the [information]. Yes, we want to make some major changes, however we want to make sure they're the right ones to achieve the things we have agreed we need to achieve, and we can only do that by having the information upon which to base that decision, and we don't have the information yet."

But, what Ms. Alleslev says excites her most about this new posting is the chance to make a positive difference for the country.

?I am usually the person who gets called in on all the jobs that I have had to try and take some tough situations and make them better,? she says. ?Obviously I wish we weren't in a tough situation and I wish we [the Conservative Party] had done better in the last election, but at the same time working with an incredible Conservative team and with our leader, the challenge of being able to make things better actually does excite me because I can see the possibilities and the opportunities to shape the vision for the country that we have been talking about.?

By Brock Weir