

Final day in Legislature was 'bittersweet' for long time MPP

By Brock Weir

While the race is heating up on who will be Newmarket-Aurora's next Member of Provincial Parliament, a 19-year career in the Legislature is winding down for Frank Klees.

Mr. Klees, who announced this winter he would not be seeking re-election made his final speech at Queen's Park on Thursday to mark the inaugural First Responders Day.

It was a 'bittersweet' time for Mr. Klees, but a fitting one, as he was one of the leading voices in a day of commemoration in honour of police, firefighters, and EMS across the province.

Celebrations got underway the night before in a special dinner in Toronto, before the time of celebration and reflection made its way to Queen's Park.

'I have to say how gratifying it was that the last day the house was sitting, I had the opportunity to celebrate with my colleagues First Responders Day in the Legislature and to have the opportunity to stand in there with First Responders as my last speech,' Mr. Klees tells The Auroran. 'The timing could not have been better. It is very, very gratifying and I feel honoured.'

Although this will be the first provincial election in nearly two decades in which his name will not be on a ballot, that does not mean he is resting on his laurels. He plans on being fully engaged in the race to replace him.

'This will be very different, but I can assure you I will not be on the sidelines,' he says. 'It is my intention to be very engaged in this election and work very hard with [PC candidate] Jane [Twinney]. I was out canvassing with her last weekend and intend to do that a lot over the course of the campaign and do what I can to raise funds for her campaign as well. I owe it to the people of our riding to be engaged. I also owe it to Jane as a new candidate to do what I can to help her get elected.'

Looking back on the events of Thursday and Friday, Mr. Klees said he was not surprised either by NDP leader Andrea Horwath saying she would not support the budget, or by Premier Wynne asking for a general election on June 12. Sitting just a stone's throw away from Ms. Horwath in the Legislature, Mr. Klees said he has been 'listening very carefully to the nuances and watching her reactions as the Premier has been responding to her.'

'It has been very clear to me that she would not be able to support this government again,' he says. 'My sense also was I believe that there is a very strong resentment on the part of the general public to the Liberal government and its behaviour over the last couple of years, and even intensified over the last six months.'

'I believe the general public wants a change from what has been branded as a scandal-ridden government. I think it would have been very difficult for Andrea Horwath to justify propping up this government one more time. What happens eventually in a minority situation is that all of the issues, the negative issues of the government end up becoming the negative issues of the party that props them up as well.'

Keenly watching the events as they unfold over the next five weeks is Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, who said there were some good things in Wynne's proposed budget, as well as some shortcomings. From a municipal perspective, he said he was pleased to see there would be mirrored funding of the Federal Government's New Building Canada Fund, as well as support for infrastructure, yet there was little in terms of indexing the gas tax.

'We will be watching what they come forward with in terms of post-secondary, what kind of plans and how they will be going forward,' said Mayor Dawe. 'The submissions to the Province are due at the end of September. To see whether or not that process gets put on hold and whether or what is their plan, I am still very much of the opinion that we need to have a post-secondary facility

in northern York Region. I still think we are an underserved area.?