

Leona Alleslev seeks mandate as Conservative MP



By Brock Weir

A year is a long time in politics ? and it's a particularly long time in the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

The Auroran's interview with Leona Alleslev coincided with the first anniversary of Leona Alleslev's dramatic floor crossing, which saw her leave the governing Liberals for the Conservative opposition, and it was also the first of a campaign for which Ms. Alleslev is vying for re-election and a mandate as a Conservative.

?There is no question that it was a difficult decision and not one that I came to quickly,? Ms. Alleslev tells The Auroran. ?The initial reaction on social media, Twitter, and stuff like that, was either very positive or very negative, and I fully appreciate that with social media. I was really surprised it was far more positive than negative. I would be at the grocery store, I would be at the Library or picking up kids at something, and people would quietly come up to me and say, ?Thank you for doing what you did. We need people who are willing to stand up for us, even if it may not be easy.' That is what our representative is supposed to do. I hadn't expected that and it was very powerful for me because it was very kind of them to take that opportunity to say that directly to me, but it also showed me that maybe there are some things more deeply broken in our system.?

Over the past year, Ms. Alleslev says she has taken a ?more in-depth? look at the country's Parliamentary structure and she has found that there are ?some things more deeply broken in the system.? Things have eroded to a point where individuals are more ?controlled by the Prime Minister's office? or the whip and ?that undermines our whole democracy.?

?I think we are going to have, as a nation, the courage to reinstate some of the really important things that Members of Parliament can do: freedom of House of Commons committees that aren't, perhaps, whipped, committees who can criticize the government. Those kinds of things we haven't

seen in a while.?

During her time as Member of Parliament, Ms. Alleslev typically spends the summer knocking on doors finding out what issues matter to local residents. Almost everyone she has talked to, she says, is concerned about what is going on in the world, from Brexit, to tensions in North Korea, Canada's relationship with China, trade, and the impact that is having on our economy, and even Russia 'being more active' in our Arctic.

'Here at home, they are obviously concerned about the instability they are seeing in jobs and the increase in precarious employment, the lack of competitiveness, the lack of money and foreign capital investment that is leaving the country, the job-losses of multinational corporations announcing they are leaving the country and all those kinds of things,' she says. 'It is almost a perfect storm: the fear globally as well as the challenges we're facing at home.'

So, how does a vote for the Conservative party address those concerns?

'We're looking at two very stark contrasts in terms of approach,' she says. 'We are recognizing, as Conservatives, that competitiveness actually is around comprehensive tax reform and around tax structures because while taxes are something we do here at home to collect revenue to provide the services that we as Canadians have decided we want to provide for, it is also an impact on whether or not we attract and retain businesses and trade with other trading countries.'

'Being that 90 per cent of our GDP comes from trade, it really matters. The fact a Conservative government has said we're going to focus on Canada's competitiveness and what that tax structure looks like so we can attract and retain businesses here and that our goods and services will be competitive, I think that will make a significant difference. Likewise around foreign policy and defence, the fact Conservatives have said Foreign Policy in Defence and relationships with our allies like NATO, our commitments to NATO and our commitments to our military will have a significant difference as well. It's almost a price of admission, so we need to have a minimum capability to retain the confidence of our allies and our own ability to defend ourselves at home. People trade with people they trust. If you have those relationships that are secure, then you're going to have trade and that will have a direct impact on our economy as well.'

When asked how these compare to local issues, Ms. Alleslev says she approaches that question in two ways. While Canadians, she says, are 'at a point where we need to look at the whole country because there are fundamental things we need to look at' like trade and 'nation-building' she is hearing from residents they are 'frustrated' with the government when dealing with CRA, on immigration issues, and other public services.

'I want to focus on the big things like economy,

nation-building, trade, defence and security, foreign affairs, but I also want to really influence the government on making sure we can actually deliver the government services to the standard Canada expects us to deliver them to, and that's right here from my constituents and right across Canada as well.?