

Liberals rally to show solidarity after Alleslev's floor-crossing



By Brock Weir

Her name was only mentioned a handful of times, but her presence loomed large on Saturday afternoon as Liberal voters in Aurora's south riding rallied to show solidarity after Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev crossed the floor to the Conservatives last Monday.

Over 70 people, along with area Liberal MPs and Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Ahmed Hussen, filled Victoria Hall to hear what those elected had to say, and their message was clear: onward.

'Like any good family, from time to time, we suffer small losses,' said Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson, who, along with Ms. Alleslev, was elected as a Liberal rookie in 2015. 'Like any good family, that makes us stronger and this will be no exception.' Firing up the audience of party faithful, Mr. Peterson extolled the achievements of the Federal Liberal government over the last three years. The economy, he said, 'has never been stronger' with 500,000 more jobs created, and the Canada Child Benefit getting more money into the hands of families who need it most.

The last time around, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau campaigned on 'sunny ways' and Mr. Peterson said that despite Ms. Alleslev leaving the party to join the opposition, 'the sun doesn't stop at Wellington.'

'These are good policies, these are policies the people of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill voted for three years ago,' Mr. Peterson continued, touting the Government's support of 'putting a price on pollution, making polluters pay and putting that money back into the hands of Canadians.'

'These are the policies I assure you one year from now the same voters will vote to continue, but we have to be honest and we have to be frank: this isn't going to happen by default. Everyone in this room is going to have to work hard. We now need to get a great, strong candidate for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill and I beg everyone to do what you can. If you know someone, bring them forward. This is an opportunity of a lifetime to have someone representing Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.'

'Whoever the candidate is, we need to continue to knock on doors, continue to make donations, continue to believe in the things we believed in three years ago. The people of Aurora, Oak Ridges and Richmond Hill have not changed. I can assure you of that.'

'I am in Aurora every day of my life and I can assure you that they believe in Liberal values as much today as last Monday, as they did last year, as they did two years ago, and as they will five years from now. Their values don't change because one-person changes parties and our values will never change. Values should not change. Values are what make us who we are. How can those change overnight? They cannot, my friends, and they should not, and they will not with anyone in this room. Only by working together can we continue to work together for the values that matter most. We will weather the storm. Believe me, the election starts today, make no mistake about it. 13 months from now, the same thing that happened in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill the last election? a Conservative incumbent will be defeated and a Liberal will be victorious.'

Similar sentiments were shared by King-Vaughan MP Deb Schulte, another rookie Liberal elected along with Mr. Peterson and Ms. Alleslev in the last Federal election, in her case after a term as Regional Councillor for the City of Vaughan. Speaking to the crowd, she offered her voice, along with those of her Liberal colleagues across York Region, as a voice in Ottawa for Liberals in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill who might feel without one.

‘It is a difficult time and at difficult times we have to come together to support each other,’ said Ms. Schulte. ‘You may think you have lost your representative up in Ottawa, but we’re here to listen to you and make sure that your voice is still very strong. We want to work with you and support the work you have to do on the ground. You are not alone. It is important for us to be here today to make sure you know in this riding that you are still listened to, that you are very, very important in our riding, and we are here for you.’

‘I was a friend of Leona’s, we both worked at Boeing. I don’t want to talk about the past, but we all feel betrayed. We feel that she was embodying the values that we have been working very hard on for the last three years. We set a very ambitious plan, that we would work hard, that we would work together, that we would reflect the majority of Canadians, and we have done that.’

The Conservatives, she added are focused on winning York Region ridings because they saw one flip from Liberal to Progressive Conservative in June’s Provincial Election (Newmarket-Aurora having gone from Liberal Chris Ballard to the PC’s Christine Elliott). ‘They think it is going to be easy and they are going to put their energy here to try and get it,’ Ms. Schulte concluded. ‘They don’t know who they’re fighting, they don’t know that we know our communities, we’re representing the majority of people in our communities, and we are ready for that fight and we’re not giving it up.’