

Menegakis withdraws Conservative nomination, looks south to Richmond Hill

By Brock Weir

Costas Menegakis has withdrawn his candidacy as the nominee for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill in the 2019 Federal Election. His move came just hours after incumbent MP Leona Alleslev, Mr. Menegakis' rival in the last Federal election, crossed the floor to join the Conservative Party last Monday.

Instead, he will seek re-election in the riding of Richmond Hill, an area he represented until new riding boundaries came into effect in time for the last election.

"It was an honour to serve as MP for Richmond Hill, and I am grateful to have been nominated to run in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill," said Mr. Menegakis in a statement. "I am also pleased to welcome Leona Alleslev to our Party. She has a wealth of experience and will be a strong asset to our team. Like our leader Andrew Scheer said, we're building a team that is ready and able to lead Canada. As I withdraw my candidacy for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, I look forward to being part of that team and to the opportunity to once again represent our party in the riding of Richmond Hill in the 2019 election. As the former MP for Richmond Hill, I will work tirelessly to earn that trust as we present our positive Conservative vision for Canada."

Now that Ms. Alleslev is a Conservative, Aurora is now represented by members from both the Government and Opposition benches.

Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson, who was once Ms. Alleslev's Liberal colleague says her move was a "surprise and a shock for sure."

"I didn't see it coming, but I wish her well," Mr. Peterson tells The Auroran. "Everyone has to make their own decisions [and] I wish her well."

Last week, Ms. Alleslev said one of the main reasons she left the Liberal government was that she felt her voice, and particularly her concerns on key portfolios like trade and defence, were not being listened to by the caucus.

Mr. Peterson, however, says his experience "has been very different to hers."

"I feel like my voice is always listened to," he says. "We have raised a few issues, even just last fall with the tax reform package, which was changed considerably from what was originally proposed, and that was due to a lot of feedback from, among others, both the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce. We were able to bring those comments and suggestions to the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, so our voice was heard there. [Our voices were also heard] on the Canada Child Benefit and getting it pegged to inflation. Then there are things around international trade and all that. Every time I have raised an issue, it has certainly been listened to and I have never felt like I don't have a voice at caucus by any stretch of the imagination. Believe me, there are many of my comments who have very different perspectives, perhaps from others in caucus. There are 180 people in caucus and there is never unanimity. People always raise different perspectives all the time."

"I have always been able to raise concerns and questions and carry messages from the constituents back up to Ottawa. I have never felt uneasy or ill-received if I have raised something that is not necessarily in agreement, or in line with what the policy of the government might be. At the end of the day, we're all meant to represent the people who elected us in. My role, as I see it, is to carry that voice here to Ottawa. That is not always in line with what the Government policy is and, when it is not, I raise it."

Mr. Peterson says he was in the House of Commons when Ms. Alleslev made her surprise move to walk across the aisle and join the Conservative benches. While listening to her press conference with Conservative leader Andrew Scheer, he says he was surprised.

"Leona and I would see each other often because we were always in Aurora together," he says. "As soon as July, we were hosting the Prime Minister in Aurora, so I was taken aback by, first of all, her move across the floor and the reasons she was giving. Those are not my experiences, but she has her own reasons and I wish her well. I am going to still be seeing her around Aurora a lot and I look forward to continue working with her in that sense and at local events making sure the community is represented."

He adds he is happy to help Aurora's southern riding find a new candidate in any way he can.

"I think there will be a few people coming forward now that there will be an opening for the role," he says. "I suspect there will be a number of very experienced and strong candidates coming forward for the nomination and I would imagine that would get underway not too far away because we have just over a year until the election."

"To the Liberal voters, if you voted Liberal you'll still have the option of voting Liberal, but at the same time, Leona made the choice she felt was the right choice, so I won't want to vilify her and make it look like she is a bad actor in all of this. She made the decision for the reasons she saw fit and I suspect she will continue to represent the riding as best she can. For the liberals in that riding, the election is only a year away, so hopefully it invigorates them, geared up and ambitious for the next election, and continue

to work hard for what their priorities and values are.?