

MP felt she was 'running out of time' ahead of floor-crossing

By Brock Weir

When Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev crossed the floor at the end of last summer, she said she felt a sense of urgency and, elaborating on that sense at the end of the year, she said she felt she was running out of time to complete her personal checklist for Aurora's south riding.

At the end of a tumultuous year, and at the start of an election year, Ms. Alleslev said securing the country's economy remained at the top of the list, specifically 'positioning' it to be a successful one not only for the next couple of years, but also the next 150. 'I have seen foreign capital leaving the country,' she says. 'We have seen large, multinational companies that are deciding not to continue, let alone expand, in Canadian jurisdictions. I have worked for Bombardier, I have worked for IBM and I know those companies compete with IBM Austria, IBM China, IBM UK. So, why is GM Canada not winning that new green technology auto manufacturing assembly line? GM is still going to build those new technology cars, so why did they choose not to build them here in Canada? If GM is making that choice, you can be sure that any number of other companies are making those same choices. We just don't know about them yet.'

Steel and aluminium tariffs levied on Canada by the United States government are 'punishing' industries and are having a significant impact on large Canadian-based companies as they forecast for the future.

'It's the government's job to be preparing and forecasting for the next six to twelve months from now,' says Ms. Alleslev. 'You're navigating the ship for where we want to go in 12 months, not where we were.'

This sense of longer-range planning, she says, is something she gets from the residents of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill 'on a daily basis', along with what she describes as the 'government's ability to run the country.'

'When I talk about running the country, I am talking about the delivery of Federal government services,' she says. 'Essentially, we're at a place where I hear on a daily basis how long it takes to get anything processed through government, how difficult it is to deal with the CRA, not just enquiring about your taxes, but dealing with the status. You have to tell five million government people that someone has died and they still don't get the memo. People are just overwhelmingly frustrated with their inability to get just basic things out of the government. They tell me they can pay their bills with an app, see everything they have paid over the phone, but they have no way of getting an answer from Revenue Canada, they have no idea whether or not they have received their money. They have no idea if their file has been reviewed. And that's just the CRA, but we can extrapolate that basically to any government department. When people lose confidence in the government's ability to just basically deliver the Federal Government services that the government is responsible for delivering, you have a big problem.'

Taxes are also a top of mind issue. 'It's not that people want lower taxes, per se, but they want less complicated taxes' and want to know their dollars are delivering 'concrete results' across the country, not just in the riding.

'The [want to know their taxes will result in] allowing their kids to have full-time jobs, allow them to have confidence in pensions, allow them to have businesses or jurisdictions, multinational global corporations that choose our jurisdictions to grow in. Taxes and tax reform have jumped to the top of the list, as have things around immigration. Even though it is not something that makes the media, cybersecurity does because people are recognizing now all the hacks and all the places where their identity is compromised, or people have come to me where they have had small amounts of money stolen from their bank account or just gone missing.

'Pipelines are also a big deal, even in Ontario. [People ask] why are we buying oil from Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, where their environmental processes are far less rigid, where their human rights and democratic structure is something to be questioned, but we have our own, we're losing money, we're giving money to regimes that are not environmental and not human rights, and Canada is suffering economically, simply when we don't need to because we have the capacity to look after ourselves. Why are we not looking after ourselves? I think that is a legitimate question.'

On the subject of human rights, Ms. Alleslev says she takes pride in the 'strides' Canada has taken in this regard in the last few decades. Prior to making her decision to cross the floor from the Liberal Government to the Conservative Opposition, Ms. Alleslev said these issues came up in the 'three-hour' conversation she had with Conservative leader Andrew Scheer that helped solidify her decision.

'I think everything is about perspective,' she says. 'I think that we, as a nation, have made incredibly great strides in the LGBTQ2 and other social programs, and the Conservative party has no intention of rolling those back. Those are [some] of the critical things I had a three-hour conversation with Andrew Scheer around, and he said, 'those are important, they are where they are and we have made great progress.' I don't believe now that those things are the most critical things that something needs to change. Those things

are exactly the way we should be.

?We live in a great country, we have human rights, we have done some great things, especially around my view the military and LGBTQ2 and making it so that the people who were charged in the military for being gay and stuff like that, that has been completely addressed and are in the process of being addressed, so we have done a great job on the social issues and we have a great country on social issues. The things that we now need to turn our attention to are the things that are much more critical at this point because they are jeopardizing people's ability to have a roof over their head and put food on the table. This is about where we need to go, not so much where we've been.

?My social perspective hasn't changed. I am still the person that I was as a Liberal and as a Conservative, certainly from a social perspective, and that is also what people in our riding have told me. Those things are good, there is always work to do, but in terms of the crisis or the critical things that will make a difference to where we want to be, those are on the right track and the Conservative party has no intention policy-wise, as they have said to me, of changing those things.?