

# Public service gave Klees wider perspective, says outgoing MPP

By Brock Weir

As the cardboard boxes pile up at his Yonge Street office in preparation for his return to the public sector after almost 20 years in the Ontario Legislature, MPP Frank Klees is reflective about the last two decades.

His time as the area's representative at Queen's Park formally comes to an end on Thursday when any one of the six local candidates vying for the Newmarket-Aurora riding is duly elected to take his place.

He admits it is a "surreal" and "bittersweet" feeling to not have his name on the ballot this time around, but he is "confident" he made the right decision to move on.

"It has been very gratifying, very rewarding, and yet it is difficult to leave behind what are literally hundreds of files of issues people had come to me to help resolve, and knowing there are some significant files left on the provincial table [brings] mixed emotions."

One of the key things he wanted to tackle fully before his term was out was the ORNGE air ambulance file. As he moves on, he hopes that the Legislature will deal with "what is necessary". On a local level, an issue which has yet to be resolved to his satisfaction is what he sees as "gaps" between seniors and homecare.

"On the other side is children's healthcare, especially mental health," says Klees. "We have serious issues in our community with young people and mental health issues. This is something to a large degree that is hidden, that needs to be dealt with, and I know there are a lot of hurting families."

He added these are issues his successor "Jane Twinney, he hopes" will pick up and run with.

With all these issues still on the backburner, one might wonder why Klees has decided to call it a day. He says he rules out any future elected office, although he is still open to opportunities to serve the public. At this stage in his life, however, he says it is the responsible thing to do.

"I am not getting any younger and this is a very taxing calling," he says.

"Practically", however, despite not getting any younger, he says he still plans to live a number of more years and MPPs just don't have a pension. Abolishing what he describes as "gold plated pensions" was one of the first acts his party did when they formed government.

"I don't believe it was a wise decision on the part of the government of the day," he says. "When people come into elected office, what people should know before they get in is essentially they are disconnecting themselves from their career and the longer one is elected, the more difficult it is to engage."

Looking back over his political career, he said he felt the "calling" to public service at an early age. He was a young seminary student when he first dipped his foot onto the public stage, giving a speech about the "responsibilities" of individuals to their communities at a church in Leamington, ON. Afterwards, he was challenged by the president of the local Progressive Conservative riding association to put his ideas into action to run for the next MPP. He didn't win, but he kept at it for the following years until he finally made it.

"Some people call it perseverance," he says. "My wife has another word for it."

It has been a journey, however, that has all been worthwhile. While countless words have been spent on what he has learned about the community, and its residents, during his time in office, he pauses when asked what he has learned about himself.

Considering the question for a moment, he says over his time in office, he has learned to become 'more accepting of people's circumstances' and the various places in which they might be in life.

'There was a time when I was, I have to say, quite judgemental and perhaps unforgiving,' says Klees. 'I am a hard worker. I have, I think, pretty high standards in terms of performance and work ethic. The longer one is in public office, you come to realise that everybody is unique, everyone has their unique challenges, and we should be slow to judge.

'It has allowed me to develop a real understanding of human nature and I think the more we take time to understand human nature, the more patient we become, the more supportive we become. As a result, we are able to make a much larger contribution to society.'