

David Tilson confirms he won't seek sixth term as Dufferin-Caledon MP

Written By MIKE PICKFORD

Dufferin-Caledon is guaranteed to have a new representative in Ottawa following next year's federal election after long-time incumbent David Tilson announced on Monday that he would not be seeking nomination for a sixth successive term.

News filtered through the community fast, with many speculating as to who could possibly replace Mr. Tilson as the local Conservative candidate in the 2019 election. So far, two individuals have been confirmed - Kevin Weatherbee (see page A2) and Harzadan Singh Khattri. Rumours of Orangeville Mayor Jeremy Williams or Caledon Councillor Jennifer Innis stepping up to the plate are, at least for the time being, unsubstantiated. In any case, there will be a significant shift in the local political landscape with Mr. Tilson's announcement.

"There comes a point when it is time to step back and let others serve our community. I have reached that point now and wish to thank all those who have supported me over the years," Mr. Tilson said in a release to media.

Speaking further with the Free Press on Monday afternoon, Mr. Tilson revealed he had "very recently" come to the decision and, up until a few days ago, was preparing himself for a sixth run for federal office. In the end, at 77 Canada's oldest serving MP is looking forward to finishing up his final year in office before ushering away into retirement.

Mr. Tilson's political career spans almost four decades, having included roles as a school board trustee, municipal councillor and MPP prior to his 15-year run as a Member of Parliament in Ottawa.

He first moved to Orangeville in 1970 and began practising law, serving two terms as a trustee with the Dufferin County Board of Education prior to his election on Orangeville Council. He served as a councillor for six years before stepping away from the local political arena.

In 1990, Mr. Tilson stated his intention to run against Liberal incumbent Mavis Wilson in the former Dufferin-Peel riding, winning the seat by just 572 votes. He would represent the riding in Queen's Park for the next five years, before defeating Ms. Wilson once again in the 1995 provincial election, this time by more than 15,000 votes. He would secure another landslide victory in 1999, securing 64.76 percent of the vote in the Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey riding.

On April 2, 2002, after serving at Queen's Park for 12 years, Mr. Tilson resigned his seat in the legislature to allow Premier Ernie Eves, who had been elected party leader without holding a seat, to run as a parachute candidate in a by-election. From 2003 to 2004, David served as vice-chair of the Ontario Municipal Board.

With the 2004 federal election on the horizon, Mr. Tilson secured the local nomination to oppose Liberal incumbent Murray Calder. In a closely contested battle, Mr. Tilson came out on top with 19,720 votes, good enough for 47.93 percent. He would go on to win four further federal elections in comfortable fashion.

Speaking of his time in Ottawa, Mr. Tilson said he's thoroughly enjoyed the multitude of roles he has been given, most notably a multi-year stint as chair of the citizenship and immigration committee from 2008 to 2015. He also spoke of his international experience, having represented Canada in dealings with both the European Union and the Council of Europe.

"That was a particular highlight, a real honour," Mr. Tilson told the Free Press. "Going to many different member states in the EU and discussing issues with members of the European parliament was a fantastic experience, one I'll continue to treasure."

He went on to state the Conservatives are in good hands under current leader Andrew Scheer, while condemning Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for what he perceives as a myriad of mistakes since his election in 2015. He questioned the Liberal government's decision to purchase the \$4.5 billion Trans Mountain pipeline without first gaining the necessary approvals to move forward with construction, while also questioning the Liberals' record when it comes to immigration.

"Mr. Trudeau seems to be like the Teflon man," Mr. Tilson said of the prime minister. "Things seem to roll off of him." He did acknowledge the PM would be happy with the recent announcement of a new NAFTA agreement, now called the United States Mexico Canada Agreement, noting it "looks good on the Liberals".

With the local nomination process now well underway, Mr. Tilson steered clear of backing any potential candidates, categorically stating "there is no way I'm going to be involved in recommending anyone for that". He noted he doesn't have any particular lingering goals or accomplishments over these last 12 months, stating he will continue to serve the public in much the same way he has for the past 14 years.

When asked what, if anything, he would miss, Mr. Tilson admitted there were some things he won't enjoy leaving behind.

"I'll miss the whole life. When you get into politics, your entire life is politics. You don't have as much family time, but the flip side of that is you get to help so many people. People get into just terrible messes with the federal government, they hit brick walls and don't know who to turn to - I've been the person the people of Dufferin-Caledon have turned to for the past 14 years. It will be a

little difficult letting go," Mr. Tilson said.

"Coming into Ottawa and looking at the parliament buildings? It makes your blood go a little faster when you get that experience, so I will miss that," Mr. Tilson added. "But, after close to 40 years in elected office, I can say with confidence that I have always kept the interests of all my constituents firmly focused in front of me. It has been a singular privilege to have served the residents of my community in various capacities to which they elected me."

He concluded, "To have had that trust placed in me for so many years is truly an honour."

- *With files from Scott Taylor.*