

Conservative MPs anxious to move forward

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Conservatives across Canada are regrouping under interim leader Candice Bergen, following the departure of O'Toole as party leader. The Conservative caucus voted 73-45 to oust O'Toole last week, who then resigned. Conservative MPs named Bergen the interim leader late last Wednesday evening. "I pledge my support and unwavering loyalty to our next leader and I urge everyone in our party to come together and do the same," O'Toole said. She wasted little time in setting the Conservative Parliamentary Leadership Team. She named House Leader: John Brassard (Barrie-Innisfil), Deputy House Leader and Co-Chair of Question Period Planning: Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard), Chief Opposition Whip: Blaine Calkins (Red Deer-Lacombe) and Deputy Whip and Co-Chair of Question Period planning: Lianne Rood (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex). Bergen has been the MP for the Manitoba riding of Portage-Lisgar since 2008. She was previously the Conservatives' deputy leader and has been among the party's most prominent voices in the House of Commons, where she frequently squares off against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other senior ministers during question period. King-Vaughan MPP Anna Roberts admitted it was a "sad day" when the party said good-bye to O'Toole. She felt for him and his family. Roberts admitted it's not easy being party leader and "he did his best." York-Simcoe MP Scot Davidson said with so many important issues gripping our country, it is "paramount that Canada's Conservatives are united and prepared for the next general election, while providing strong, effective, and principled opposition in Parliament. "I look forward to working with the new interim leader of the Conservative Party and continuing to stand up for the residents of York-Simcoe, who are looking to move on from this pandemic and get life back to normal. "I would like to thank Erin O'Toole and his family for his service to our country as Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and I wish him all the best in the future." Davidson said the caucus has spoken and party faithful remain optimistic in these challenging times. There are a lot of big issues facing this country, he pointed out, noting a change of leadership is the "best way forward." He noted he worked with Bergen in the past, adding he's always building relationships in Ottawa. Davidson himself has had a whirlwind ride, being first elected in a bylaw election in February of 2019. He then participated in the 2019 federal election, and again in 2021. His support remained solid in both elections as he earned just under 25,000 votes each time. Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seeback noted O'Toole's departure was a question of leadership and the party needed a change. While the Conservatives have had three different leaders in the past six years, Seeback is not pessimistic. In fact, he said the next leader will be someone who can not only pull things together, but tackle the challenges on behalf of constituents. The Conservatives, he admitted, have to cement their policies on things like climate change and housing. Affordable housing an important issue facing all Canadians and this one issue needs to be addressed as soon as possible. The federal government, he said, has done nothing on this issue, despite their election promises. In fact, the Liberal government "can't walk and chew gum at the same time," Seeback observed. The Liberals, he predicts, will continue to polarize Canadians. The Conservatives are a "big tent" party and it will take a "special leader" to reunite them. The national council will work with the interim leader, who can't run to replace O'Toole full time. The council hasn't set a date for the next leadership race. Once the Leadership Election Organizing Committee (LEOC) is appointed, they will set the rules and procedure for the leadership selection process.