

Conservatives will do 'soul-searching' to learn what went wrong

By Bill Rea

The federal Conservatives held their first caucus meeting last Thursday after the Oct. 19 federal election, and Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson reports his colleagues were in an upbeat mood.

This is despite the fact the party has been relegated to the opposition side of the House of Commons.

'It was a long, long meeting,' Tilson commented shortly after it broke up.

The elected Tory MPs were on hand, as well as Conservative senators and even defeated former MPs.

One of the things that was accomplished with the election of former cabinet minister Rona Ambrose, from Alberta as interim leader of the party, and Ontario MP David Sweet as chair of caucus.

Tilson said there were about five candidates seeking to be interim leader, and the matter was decided by preferential ballot.

'It was a pretty enthusiastic meeting,' he observed, although he also said there was disappointment evident in the members who were defeated.

'Certainly, those of us who were re-elected are disappointed we're not in government,' he said.

He added former leader and prime minister Stephen Harper spoke. 'He showed his appreciation for being leader and prime minister,' he said, adding he looked at the defeated members and accepted responsibility for the loss.

Tilson said Harper has not indicated if he plans to resign his seat in the House, so he's assuming the former leader is going to stay around.

The convention to select a permanent leader is some time off, Tilson observed. He said the party will have to have some 'soul-searching time' to determine what went wrong in the election.

'I think there'll be more respect for what goes on,' he said

'We will certainly be holding Mr. Trudeau and his new cabinet to account,' Tilson added, pointing out the Liberals made a lot of promises during the campaign, so there will be a wait to see which ones are honoured.

'I sense there's a new feeling of respect for the system,' he added. 'We would do our best to do that.'

Commenting on the make-up of Trudeau's new cabinet, Tilson said he knows the people who sat in the House of Commons before the election, commenting they're 'all very competent people.'

He commented on John McCallum being named Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, pointing out he did a good job as Immigration Critic. But Tilson also commented on the Liberals' plans to bring in 25,000 refugees from Syria by the end of the year, stating he's not sure how they're going to do that.

But there are a lot of new members of the cabinet that Tilson said he doesn't know. He said he's read their biographies, and they seem qualified.

New Finance Minister Bill Morneau has been very successful in business, he observed.

'He's an experienced person in business, which we need in a finance minister, but he has zero experience in politics,' Tilson commented.

He was little surprised that former Toronto police chief Bill Blair didn't get a position, adding he was expecting Andrew Leslie to get an appointment. 'I have a lot of respect for Wayne Easter,' he added, pointing out the former minister is not in the cabinet either.

Tilson also pointed to Trudeau's desire to assign half of the positions to women, noting that would have restricted what he could do.