

Tilson pleased with look of Harper's new cabinet

By Bill Rea

There were few surprises for Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson in light of Monday's shuffling of the federal cabinet by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

What was being billed as a major adjustment was actually rather minor in nature, with most of the cabinet heavyweights, such as Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, staying put.

But Tilson pointed out a general election is about two years away, and the Prime Minister is interested in working with people he knows are going to run again. He cited the examples of Minister of State and Chief Government Whip Gordon O'Connor and Public Safety Minister, who have both announced they will be leaving their seats.

"I think he (Harper) wants to go in with a cabinet who will be running in the next election," Tilson observed.

Environment Minister Peter Kent was dropped from Cabinet. Tilson called him "a great guy," adding he's probably in line to be a Parliamentary assistant or committee chair.

"Environment is one of the tricky portfolios," he added.

Tilson also said the heart of the government's focus these days is on the economy.

He observed Harper was also looking for some younger faces in cabinet. Tilson cited Michelle Rempel, who was named Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), and Chris Alexander, who is now Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. He knows both well, commenting that Alexander has a cottage near his, and is "a very smart young guy."

He added both Alexander and Rempel are full of energy and "very good on their feet."

But Tilson was also impressed with the ministers who are staying in their old positions. He recently travelled to Europe with Harper and a couple of ministers who are staying on, such as Joe Oliver (Natural Resources), John Baird (Foreign Affairs), Edward Fast (International Trade) and Steven Blaney (who has moved to Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness from Veterans' Affairs), and got to know all those ministers well during the trip and was impressed with the work they've been doing. He said Fast has been working on trade agreements in Europe, and that Baird is very highly thought of on the continent.

Tilson said he didn't have any thoughts that he would get on Cabinet, adding he really didn't want an appointment.

"It's a tough life," he remarked, adding he has a teenage daughter and a wife who acts almost like a single mom when he's in Ottawa.

"I'm not prepared to lead that life."

"If you're a minister, you don't go home," he added. "You're obligated not just to your riding, but the country. I'm more interested in being in the riding when I'm not in Ottawa."