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'New party needs new leader,' Alliance member says

BY MIKE ADLER
 Staff Writer

Nothing personal, Preston. True, Canadian Alliance members in York Region dumped Manning decisively for Stockwell Day in all five ridings in York Region Saturday.

But some of them, like Doug Clark, had a genuine sense of regret in not voting for Manning as leader.

Clark, treasurer of the Vaughan-King-Aurora riding Alliance association and a member and campaigner for the old Reform party since 1991, saw nothing wrong with Manning.

But a new party almost has to have a new leader "to get on with things", Clark said, adding Manning was surrounded by advisers who didn't know how to get through to Ontario voters.

His sense of sadness at Mannings fall is shared by Jeff Scobie, Alliance riding president for York North, who joined Reform in 1992.

"There's a lot of people up here who go back a long ways with Preston Manning," said the Newmarket man, who ranks Manning's accomplishments as highly as any Canadian politician of the last century.

'It came down to: does he have a broad enough appeal to the voters in Ontario?'

But perhaps people needed a change, Scobie said. Those who voted for Tom Long on the first Alliance leadership ballot most likely wanted a change, he added, so Day was the logical choice for them on the second ballot.

York Region ridings weren't out of step in turfing Manning, who polled an average of 35.8 per cent of Alliance voters here, almost exactly the 36-per-cent mark on second ballots set across the country.

But after the first ballot, things didn't look so hopeless for Manning in either Markham, Oak Ridges, Thornhill, Vaughan-King-Aurora or York North.

Unlike in other parts of the province, Day was not the first-ballot choice of most party members here who voted.

Tom Long, a Mike Harris adviser with close ties to the provincial Conservatives, captured the highest tally in all five ridings and then, when eliminated from the run-off, urged his supporters to back Manning.

But most of those supporters didn't listen.

Clark thinks Day's appeal lies in demographics, in knowing he can do well with baby boomers and their children in Ontario and Alberta.

Clark, his wife and two daughters all voted for Long on the first ballot, then switched to Day — and Clark suggested that's not atypical. "It came down to: does he have a broad enough appeal to the voters in Ontario?"

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