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Former Markham Tory testing Alliance waters

Former policy vice-president may challenge Jim Jones

BY MIKE ADLER
 Staff Writer

Markham MP Jim Jones, forced from the Conservative caucus for saying he would stand for both Tory and Alliance nominations in his riding, could face stiff competition in seeking the Alliance nod.

And surprisingly, it may come from a man who, until recently, was a close colleague of the MP in the ridings' Tory association.

Testing the waters is Kirk Sutherland, the former Tory policy vice-president for Markham who jumped to the Alliance this year and led Stockwell Day's York Region leadership campaign.

Sutherland said he was approached about seeking the Markham nomination by Alliance members after Day's successful bid and is now "reflecting on the idea and listening to a lot of people".

Sutherland, who added he already has the consent of his family to run, said he felt Jones wanted to run for the Tories. "He never mentioned to the people of this riding he was seeking the nomination of the Canadian Alliance."

Conservative leader Joe Clark expelled Jones, Ontario's only Tory MP last month after Jones announced his plan to seek Alliance voters' backing as the sole conservative candidate in Markham.

"You can't play for two teams at the

same time," he declared.

Clark had previously warned Jones against seeking a riding-level accommodation with the Alliance and the Tories' constitution makes it plain that Tory candidates will run in all 301 federal ridings.

This week, Jones said he will stand for the Tory nomination, but was less certain about seeking the Alliance nod.

"We're the party that is healthy and we're the ones moving up in the world. The PC party isn't."

The MP said he has been waiting for Clark to respond to some published comments by Manitoba Tory Brian Pallister, who argued the party constitution does not forbid a Tory candidate from seeking approval of local Alliance members. "I haven't seen anything there (by Clark in response)," Jones added.

"By the end of the month, I will be in a good position to know what I'm going to do."

Ed Brown, an Alliance vice-president for Markham, said a search committee is talking to people, but there are no declared candidates.

Sutherland, who has also advanced the idea of having only one conservative candidate to avoid splitting the opposition vote in certain ridings, said he likes the Alliance's chances in Markham.

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