

Belinda was 'square peg in round hole'

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bring civility back to politics.

"I met with the prime minister Monday at 24 Sussex and I asked if he was serious about democratic renewal. In essence, he said (I) have the authority to bring forth the solutions so that (the sponsorship scandal) won't happen again."

Facing a storm of media criticism and charges of blind ambition from former colleagues, Ms Stronach believes residents of Newmarket-Aurora will understand her motives.

"People who know me know that I'm in politics for reasons of public service; not for any personal gain. At the end of the day, they may not always agree with me, but I believe they respect someone who will stand up for her principles."

MANAGER SHOCKED

Ms Stronach said her dissatisfaction with the Tories and leader Stephen Harper is well-documented.

"I've been uncomfortable with the leader, the direction he's taken, for some time. I've spoken up a number of times and perhaps this shouldn't have come as a great surprise."

Bill Atkinson, president of the Newmarket-Aurora federal Liberal riding association, agreed and welcomed Ms Stronach to the party.

"It was a little bit of a surprise, but I've always felt that Belinda was a square peg in a round hole," Mr. Atkinson said.

But the man who was preparing to run her campaign for the Tories, Peter Seeman, said he was shocked by the move.

"Many people are very upset and we'd like to hear about why she did this," said

Mr. Seeman, the former riding president.

"It's no secret her views on many issues were different than the party's, but Mr. Harper created an environment for opposing issues. We were looking at building a broader tent."

York-Simcoe MP Peter Van Loan, who is now the lone Tory MP in York Region, characterized the defection as pure political ambition.

"She wants to become PM at some point and it's starting to look as if there isn't going to be any openings on our side of the House," Mr. Van Loan said.

"If she can make it through the next election, she could be the sole Liberal not tainted by the corruption scandal."

And the NDP's Ed Chudak, who ran in Newmarket-Aurora last June and expects to do so in the next election, believes Ms Stronach had another option.

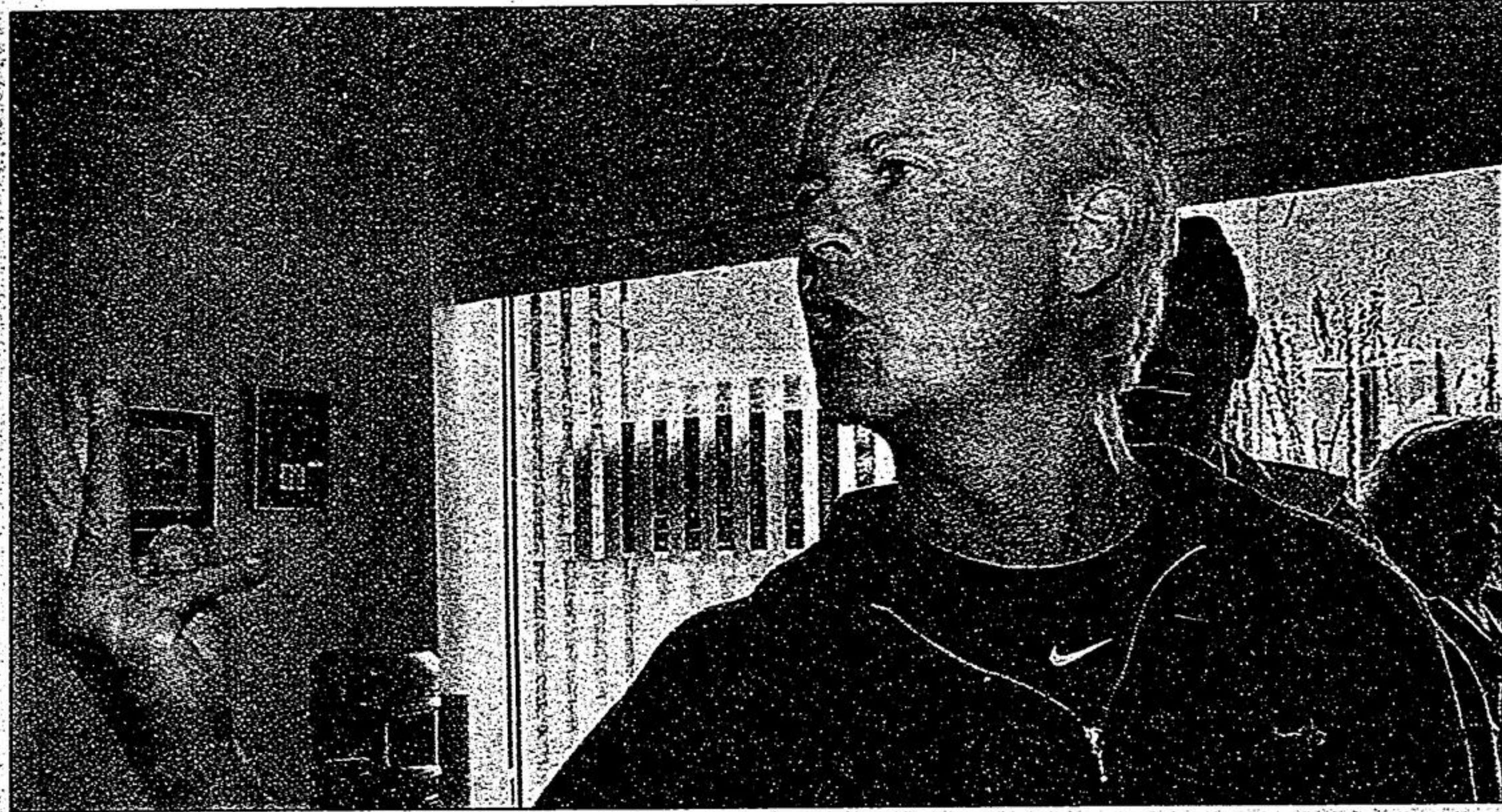
"It smacks of opportunism," Mr. Chudak said. "She voted against (the Liberals) last week and now she's joined them as a cabinet minister. She could have simply decided to sit as an independent."

But campaign worker Jack Hurst was more philosophical about Ms Stronach's decision.

"A lot of us are feeling disappointed and hurt," he said.

"Under our system, she's certainly allowed to do that and she was guided by her own moral compass, her own decision-making process."

"As part of the (campaign) team, we're all focused, but once you're removed from the riding and into Ottawa, there are so many dynamics we may not understand. It's a different world; you do what you have to do."



One-time Belinda Stronach campaign supporter Paul Marshall vents his frustration to Newmarket constituency office staff Tuesday.

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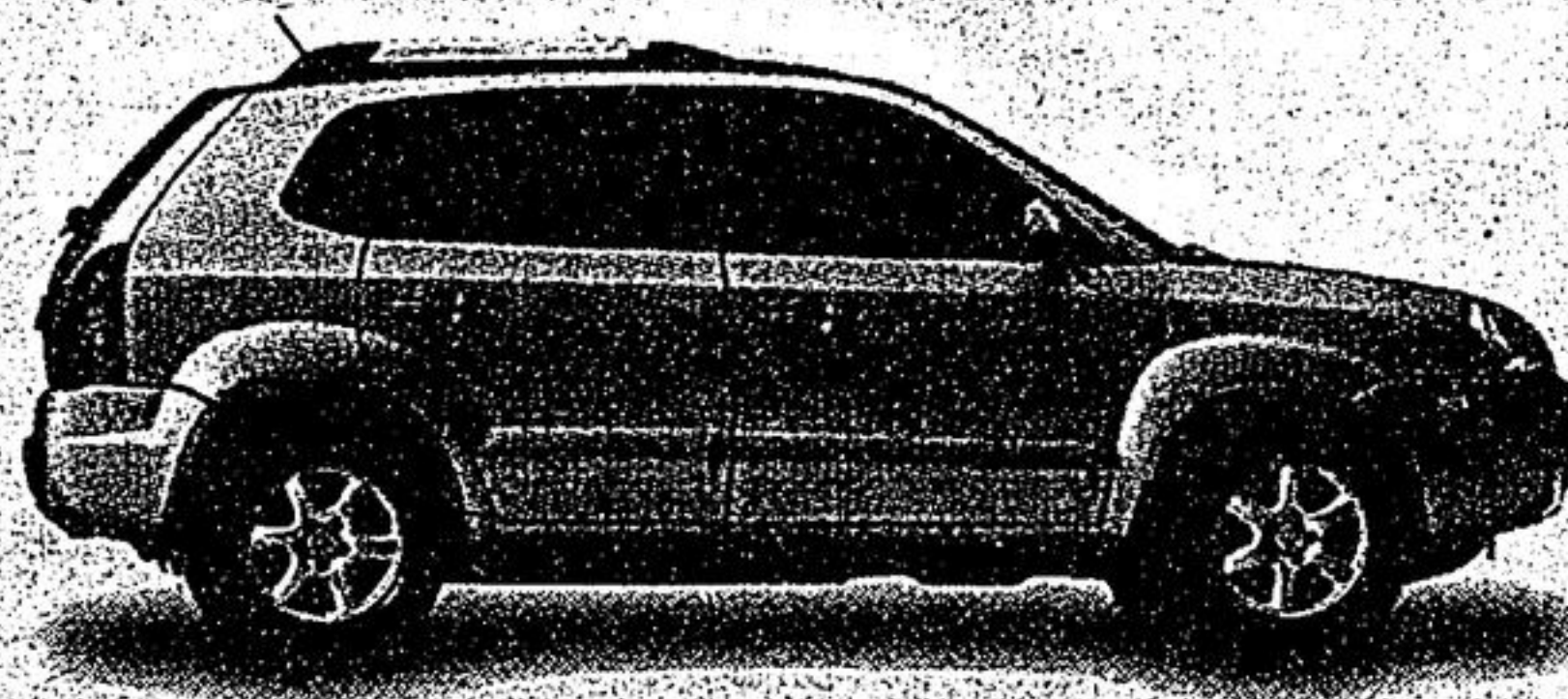
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