

York MPs touted as possible Liberal leaders

OTHER CONTENDERS

Buzz surrounds Stronach, Bevilacqua

BY LISA QUEEN AND CAROLINE GRECH
Staff Writers

"Backbench Opposition MP" on the business cards of political star Belinda Stronach? You've got to be kidding.

Even before defeated Prime Minister Paul Martin had finished telling Canadians Monday night he is stepping down as Liberal leader, the name of the Newmarket-Aurora MP was being bandied about as a possible successor.

On the heels of her decisive victory over rival Lois Brown, Ms Stronach isn't dismissing a bid for the party leadership.

"I'm young, I've got a lot of energy left and a lot of passion left and I've got a lot I wish to contribute," she said yesterday.

At the same time, she tempered her comments with reminders Mr. Martin hasn't vacated the leader's post yet.

"I would take my direction from him. I think it's fair to say I want to be part of the team that rebuilds the party," said Ms Stronach, who lost a bid for the Conservative leadership to Stephen Harper in 2004.

Ms Stronach is not the only York Region Liberal apparently pondering a leadership bid.

Vaughan MP Maurizio Bevilacqua is also part of the buzz, according to



BELINDA STRONACH: Newmarket-Aurora MP wants to help rebuild Liberal party.

Vaughan-King-Aurora MPP Greg Sorbara, a long-time provincial organizer.

Mr. Bevilacqua, who could not be reached for comment, has been mentioned both by the *Globe and Mail* and CBC as a possible replacement for Mr. Martin.

"There certainly has been talk of both of them (Ms Stronach and Mr. Bevilacqua)," said Mr. Sorbara, adding Liberal phones have been ringing off the hook the last few days with chitchat of possible candidates.

"My own sense is there will be a relatively long list of candidates."

"Belinda is a natural choice. Belinda

has the pedigree, she has the profile," York Region Liberal insider Scott Crone said.

"Does she have the ambition to do it? It's up to her to answer."

Mr. Crone dismissed suggestions Ms Stronach's decision to cross the floor from the Tories to the Liberals last spring could hurt her chances.

Others have made similar leaps without damaging their political careers, he said, including John Crosbie, a former Newfoundland Liberal politician who went on to a successful career with the federal Conservatives.

While Mr. Bevilacqua is not a household name, Mr. Crone pointed out he's

known within the party, he has represented in the House of Commons since 1988.

"He knows how to organize, he knows how to fundraise. He networks. I think Maurizio is fairly well regarded within the party," he said.

"Both (Mr. Bevilacqua and Ms Stronach) would be viable candidates from York Region."

The two politicians may want to discuss the hazards of waging a leadership bid with Mr. Sorbara, who took an unsuccessful crack at the provincial party leadership in the 1980s.

"It's a mammoth undertaking. It's a big, steep mountain to climb," he said.

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