

MP has always had political aspirations

SUN-TRIBUNE PEOPLE

BY SANDRA BOLAN
Staff Writer

Most little boys want to be a fire-fighter or police officer when they grow up. But there are some boys who want to grow up to become world leaders.

Like Paul Calandra — MP for Oak Ridges-Markham — who took a major step forward towards becoming Prime Minister of Canada when he narrowly beat Oak Ridges-Markham Liberal incumbent Lui Temelkovski in November.

"I appreciate I'll never get 100 per cent of the vote, so 100 per cent of the people will not think the same way as me," Mr. Calandra said, referring to his 520-vote margin of victory. "I want (everyone, no matter who they voted for) to feel comfortable to call me for anything. Ultimately, I'll try my best to not let them down."

Mr. Calandra's political aspirations started long before he knew the difference between a Conservative and a Liberal.

At age 9, he pestered his father to allow him to deliver flyers for his neighbourhood Progressive Conservative candidate John Gamble.

ONCE A YOUNG LIBERAL

"I didn't know who it was for; I just wanted to deliver flyers for a political party," he said.

Throughout Mr. Calandra's adolescence, he continued to manoeuvre the political landscape in an effort to figure out where he belonged.

"Initially, in my high school days, I was a young Liberal," he said. "In the latter part of high school, when you start paying attention and analyzing politics, I started developing my own ideas (and) by university, I was fully Conservative."

Although Mr. Calandra was prepping himself for a career in politics through his volunteer work, when it was time to head off to university, he chose what interested him, not what would get him ahead in Ottawa. They just happened to be the same thing.

"I was always of the view that if it happened in politics (I'd) run with it. If not, that's OK," he said.

After about two years at Carleton University studying political science and history, Mr. Calandra was forced to leave the classroom behind.

"The Rae government, at that time, was catastrophic for our businesses (as landlords), so I had to come home and help run the family business," he said.



MP Paul Calandra enjoys a moment at home with his wife, Melanie, and their daughters, Natalie, 2, and Olivia, two months.

Mr. Calandra said he never officially dropped out of university, which enabled him to complete his bachelor of arts degree via distance education. He finally graduated this past November.

"I've always been proud of the fact I continued to take courses," he said. "Do I have (my degree) on the wall in Ottawa? Yes, I'm very proud of it."

Throughout that time, Mr. Calandra, 38, also never gave up his political aspirations.

"I always knew I was going to

run for office," he said, admitting that he would be interested in the country's top job some time in the future.

CAMPAIGN MANAGER

In 1995, Mr. Calandra accepted a position with the Mike Harris government, where he served as chief of staff to MPP Steve Gilchrist, former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, chair of the Red Tape Commission and first Commissioner of Alternative Energy. He also served as a campaign

manager in two federal elections and three provincial elections and as a regional organizer for Stephen Harper's leadership campaign and Jim Flaherty's provincial leadership campaign.

When Mr. Calandra was elected in November, he was eager to get moving on a variety of projects. But since Parliament has been prorogued, Mr. Calandra has been forced to patiently await January's session re-start. "I'm frustrated by the speed at which the transition has taken place," he noted.

Once session does finally resume in January, Mr. Calandra said he is ready to move ahead with such things as ensuring federal money from the Canada Building Fund is funneled into local projects; farming remains a viable occupation for area residents and the Markham Stouffville Hospital expansion takes place.

"I think, and I know, I can be of assistance to promote the hospital to Queen's Park, and locally," he said.

Although a recent report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information revealed that Markham Stouffville Hospital has the highest death rate in Canada, Mr. Calandra still believes the hospital provides a wonderful service to the community.

"I always like to take those reports and contrast them with what I've seen," he said.

And what Mr. Calandra has seen, has been nothing but positive, noting his two children — two-and-a-half year old Natalie and two-month-old Olivia Joy were both born there.

Rounding out Mr. Calandra's family, which now resides in Stouffville, is his wife of three years, Melanie, and their black Labrador retriever, Phoebe.

LIVED IN MARKHAM

Mr. Calandra spent the first few years of his life in Markham, before the family moved onto a farm in Ballantrae. Recognizing that at the time Hwy. 48 was the area's main route north during the summer's cottage getaway season, the family made money by setting up shop on the side of the road to sell fruits and vegetables grown on their farm.

"I loved it, but it's really hard having two young kids up in Ballantrae," he said of why the family lives in town. "As much as I miss it, I love being in town."

One thing you probably didn't know about Mr. Calandra is that while at Carleton University, he spent a year in the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, a primary reserve infantry regiment of the Canadian Forces.

"I (wanted to) go through basic training and understand what they go through," he said.

Two nights a week and during every weekend for a year, Mr. Calandra participated in basic training, which he admitted was extremely difficult because he was an overweight and out-of-shape 22-year-old, undisciplined student.

"The first night my body seized up because I was so out of shape," he said. "It was probably the most difficult thing I had done until that time."

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