

MP's days can be long, hard – and worthwhile

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To whom much is given, much is expected.

That's the motto Markham-Stouffville MP and Health Minister Jane Philpott lives by, and it's what drives her motivation to help her community and her country.

In a detailed interview with The Sun-Tribune, Philpott talked about her past year in office, how she's adjusted to changes and how she feels as a representative of Markham-Stouffville.

"I love this community," she said. "I've spent a long time here and to be able to take from what I know about this community, as well as my medical background and serving people in the health care system, to be able to represent as a member of parliament but also have the huge privilege of being asked to be minister of health is a pretty remarkable experience. And it's been very positive."

Philpott was chosen by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last October to serve as minister of health; she's the first doctor to hold the post since 1935, when the portfolio had a different name.

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She thinks it's because many doctors don't enter politics. When asked why she chose to join the fray, she explained how her options to help people as a doctor were limited.

"It takes more than medicine to make people healthy," she said. "It takes housing, having a job, having economic opportunity; those are all things doctors can't fix."

"My goal being a doctor was to help improve people's lives, and I found as a doctor I didn't have all the tools that I needed. For me, politics is a tool to be able to improve people's lives."

In addition to moving forward the new Canada Child Benefit, Philpott has been involved in several initiatives by the federal government. She was part of the team that helped bring 30,000 refugees to Canada, she was vital in creating legislation for medically-assisted dying, she announced the introduction of federal marijuana legislation for spring 2017 and now has a project for further collaboration between the federal government and the provinces on health care.

"That's what I'm enjoying the most," she said. "I've started working on a negotiation for a new health accord between the federal government and the provinces and ter-

ritories to put an increased focus on home care, mental health care and making prescription drugs more affordable."

She says her work is challenging but is outweighed by the opportunity to serve as health minister. She thanks her constituency staff and her parliamentary staff for their help and support. And as it's the longest hours she's ever worked, she often thinks of her family's home just off Main Street in downtown Stouffville.

"At times, it's hard to be away from home," she said. "That's one of the challenges, I miss time with my family, and I miss my patients."

Having previously been a few minutes' walk from work, Philpott's new job takes her everywhere, including the United Nations, where she spoke at a special session of the General Assembly in April.

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Philpott says the "world is paying attention" to Canada and is interested in the decisions the federal government is making under Justin Trudeau. She mentions the federal plan to improve infrastructure is endorsed by "economists throughout the world."

For Markham-Stouffville, that broad investment translates to something as significant as broadband access or public transit.

It's just a couple of the many issues her constituents bring her. She says one of the most common things people coming to the office talk about is immigration issues.

"Almost every topic you see in the paper, we'll get letters about it," she said. "We work as connectors, we've tried to make it really clear that we're open to help people and if we can't we'll direct them elsewhere."

Philpott says her most challenging issue was the legislation around medically assisted dying.

"It required a tremendous amount of work, a tremendous amount of conversation," she said. "Trying to listen well to people with a huge range of opinions and respect that diversity of opinion was a good test of my family doctor skills."

She was once only known in Stouffville, but now Philpott's name is common in important conversations throughout the country. She says the fame doesn't bother her because they're all people she represents, be it locally or nationally.

A busy job requires a lot of motivation. When asked how she motivates herself to keep going despite long hours, extended time away from home and a wide range of opinions, Philpott said it's built in her.

"It's part of who I am, how I was raised," she said. "People like me that have received a lot of opportunities in this country have an obligation to give back to society."

"That's also how you find meaning in life," Philpott added.



Health Minister Jane Philpott speaking in the House of Commons and (below) talking with residents Stewart and Barbara Wideman at her office on Main Street in Stouffville.



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