



## The Hard Work for Jane Philpott Begins as Stouffville Plays its Part in Ending the Harper Years

By Ben Embiricos

On the morning of October 20th, the newly formed Federal riding of Markham-Stouffville woke up with one fewer MP. Normally this would be bad news but supporters of Jane Philpott won't mind. Dr. Philpott and her volunteers turned Stouffville Liberal again following Paul Calandra having flown the Blue Conservative flag from 2008 to 2015. Stouffville was representative of the Liberal revival that took place right across the country and of the tide turning against Stephen Harper's Conservatives.

For Dr. Philpott of course the hard work has just begun. Stouffville residents will keenly watch to see whether the Liberals' promises to spend on infrastructure can improve regional transit which remains an area of concern across the 905. Of particular local significance is the Pickering Airport issue which has rumbled on for over forty three years since prime farm land and homes were taken from residents and farmers to the east of Stouffville. Dr. Philpott expressed opposition to the airport on the campaign trail which has raised expectations among the longstanding airport opponents. (See: <http://www.landoverlandings.com/documents/UPDATE27-Oct142015-final.pdf>)

Even from the perspective of many Conservatives it should be said that in

recent years the Harper government had taken on a decidedly negative approach. Many voters continued to value Mr. Harper's approach to the economy. However questionable foreign policy, a refusal to engage with the media and parliamentary process made him an easy figure to dislike. Dr. Philpott with her optimistic approach became part of the answer to the weariness of much of the Canadian electorate.

Our outgoing MP, Paul Calandra, served as Mr. Harper's Parliamentary Secretary from 2013-2015 and had been harshly criticised at times for providing non-answers in Question Period. Being associated strongly with Mr. Harper may mean that Mr. Calandra will have a tough road ahead of him if he is to revive his political career. To rebuild, the Conservatives are likely to pivot away from Mr. Harper's approach.

It is hard to know to what extent the election result was a vote for Justin Trudeau as distinct from a vote against Mr. Harper. Widespread concerns remain about Mr. Trudeau's lack of experience and reliance upon his family name to have got him where he is. But for the voters in the middle he was the "anyone but Harper" choice and it must be said that for many young voters he probably offers genuine hope.

While I have voted Conservative in past elections, I felt uncomfortable putting my

cross against their name this time. The deal breaker for me was the "barbaric practices" hotline and the Niqab issue. The messaging here seemed like a deliberate attempt to drum up votes by appealing to the voters' xenophobic side or the ultra-secularist Quebec contingent. Of course honour killings and the like should be dealt with severely by the justice system like any other serious crimes. But why raise this sensitive issue during an election campaign? It felt to me like a very low blow from the win at all costs play book which meant I could not put my name to the Conservative cause.

In the coming years I hope that the Conservatives will develop a more positive expression of their values. I believe that most Conservatives genuinely believe

that free markets together with strong and progressive social policies provide the fairest, most prosperous society. This message has been lost sight of in recent years.

Congratulations though to the Liberals and to Dr. Jane Philpott. The last word should go to her. Encapsulating the spirit of optimism that brought the Liberals back to power Dr. Philpott said in her victory speech that "a seat in the House of Commons is not a target it's a tool ...that we are going to use collectively to make this community better, to make this country stronger. We have only just begun".

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