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# Outsiders looking in: what Barrie's new MPs can expect in Ottawa

## Links with provincial politicians may help

Barrie Advance

By [Laurie Watt](#)

Barrie and Innisfil's new MPs will go to work in a leaderless party, a party questioning the way it should go, while they sit in the Opposition benches as the Liberal government prepares to spend.

"We're behind the eight-ball, that's for sure. It's going to be tough," said Innisfil Mayor Gord Wauchope.

"I believe that Justin Trudeau said he'll work with everybody. We'll see."

At first glance, the reality doesn't look good, but perhaps it's not as bad as it might appear initially and it does have its opportunities.

Simcoe County shut out the Liberals, but the razor-thin win for Conservative Alex Nuttall in Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte shows that riding may be winnable next time.

Still the reality is we're on the outside.

"It's always easier to influence government when you're a part of government. By being effectively shut out here, it will be much harder," said Laurentian at Georgian professor Michael Johns.

"The government itself is supposed to govern for everybody, whether they voted for them or not. Clearly there's a need for infrastructure (investment) here and it will be the job of the bureaucracy to identify that. But when it gets to cabinet, it will be harder, because we don't have a voice."

York University's Robert MacDermid said Tory-held ridings had their day and the Canadian reality is a partisan one.

"Where there's some discretion, they will generally favour their own MPs, rather than the opposition's. That's the reality," said MacDermid.

"They're not part of the decision-making community. They'll find they're on the outside when it comes to influence."

Here in Barrie, an array of frustrating bottlenecks point to the need for the Harvie-Big Bay Point Road connection, a wider underpass on Essa Road at Hwy. 400 and a new bridge over Hwy. 400 on Dunlop Street.

Undoubtedly there are also needs in the 184 ridings the Liberals won.

Yet we have a high-profile Liberal advocate: Mayor Jeff Lehman chairs the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO).

Lehman was quick to congratulate the federal Liberals Tuesday.

"We are hugely encouraged by the Liberal Party's platform of infrastructure investment, which is based on true collaboration with municipalities... Canada's cities will now have a true partner on Parliament Hill," he said.

Lehman said he benefits from having worked with both Nuttall successful Barrie-Innisfil candidate John Brassard, who served on council with him for eight years.

"Having two experienced members of council as our MPs means the local issues will be front and centre," said Lehman, who appointed Nuttall as his federal liaison in 2010.

Lehman is also more optimistic the Liberals will be less partisan than the Tories, who spent more infrastructure grants in Conservative ridings before the election.

"On the issue of Central Ontario not voting in any Liberals, yes, that does create the additional challenge that you don't have a voice inside the government. However this government has said that it intends to remove politics from the decision-making surrounding infrastructure spending, for example, by using gas tax and other envelope funding to allow local municipalities to determine needs."

Wauchope said he also has good relationships with provincial cabinet ministers, who could have some influence with their federal cousins.

"With those connections, I'm hoping the federal government will step up and help us."

Johns added Nuttall's close win shows the riding deserves some attention as the Liberals think more long-term as they implement a \$10-billion-a-year infrastructure plan.

"You might say Simcoe County isn't as strong a Conservative stronghold as it was and if we don't ignore it and invest in the region, there's a possibility those ridings could be won when Justin Trudeau is looking to be re-elected," said Johns.

At the same time, Simcoe County's newest MPs could have some impact on shaping their party as the Harper era ends.

“The rookies are stepping into a difficult situation. They’re arriving on their first day of work and their boss just quit,” said Johns.

“It’s part of the renewal and they’ll be part of that from the ground up.”

York University’s MacDermid said similar soul-searching is happening elsewhere.

“They’re wrestling as all conservative parties are — as Republicans in the U.S. and as Ontario Progressive Conservatives have. If the party splits in the leadership race, the party will be back to where it came from, the PCs and the Reform. That seems to be a recurring trend with Conservatives in Canada,” MacDermid said, adding the real test will be keeping the party unified.

Former Barrie MP Patrick Brown seized a similar opportunity after the provincial Tories were again shut out of government in last year’s Liberal wave.

“Maybe what Ontario has shown this time and in the last two provincial elections is the Tories were running on a hard-right social program (most Ontarians don’t support),” MacDermid said.

Returning “with another leader like Harper may not be best,” he added.

Brown now leads Question Period at Queen’s Park and he taught both Brassard and Nuttall as they worked on his leadership campaign that took him from dark horse in September 2014 to winner in May.

The federal Conservatives are expected to choose an interim leader to give them time to go through the process of finding a new leader next year, after Harper stepped down election night.