

## 'I don't intend to leave politics until I have built those hospitals,' says MPP Wilson

By Brock Weir

Rebuilding New Tecumseth's 'remarkable' local hospital remains a top priority for Simcoe-Grey MPP Jim Wilson the new Progressive Conservative Ontario Government settles in for its term.

Mr. Wilson, who was handily re-elected to serve this riding in last month's Provincial Election, admits he has had this priority for a while, but, being part of the government after over 15 years in the opposition benches, he says the momentum is now there to see some movement on the file.

'First and foremost are the local issues,' Mr. Wilson tells The Times in finding that balance between his role as a local MPP and his new role as Ontario's Minister of Economic Development and Growth. 'The two hospitals need to be redeveloped. We need to expedite as best we can getting Georgian Bay pipeline water down to Tottenham. We need to fully fund our hospices at both ends. Those were the priorities that came out in the campaign.'

'I had a brief chat with the Minister of Health [when we were sworn in] and she only had her hand off the Bible for about 30 seconds before I said, 'I'm going to need two hospitals.' She said, 'I knew you were going to say that!' We'll work on it. Hospitals take a long time to plan and require a lot of money, but I am committed to doing it. I said during the campaign that I felt I was the candidate in the best position to get the job done, and I intend to get the job done. I don't intend to leave politics until I have built those hospitals.'

'This is my third campaign talking about a new hospital for Alliston because it is just so obvious that it is needed and they do tremendous work there. It is the fifth most efficient hospital in the province, which is remarkable for its size, and it also has the fifth shortest wait times for emergencies in the Province. It was built for 7,000 emergency room visits a year and last year did just under 50,000. It is remarkable what they can do, but it is remarkable what they will be able to do when they get a new facility, not IF they get a new facility.'

While Mr. Wilson cites a number of factors contributing to the delay in hospital projects, here in New Tecumseth, he says a big difference in recent years is the appointment of Jody Levac to lead Stephenson Memorial Hospital.

'It wasn't until Jody came on board about three years ago that the whole attitude of the hospital changed among the administration and Board [regarding rebuilding], and we got a new board,' says Mr. Wilson. 'They developed the attitude that they can do it, they can raise the money and they can build a new hospital. That hurdle is over and it is a matter of convincing my own government right now to give us the planning grant money, which is about \$24 million for each hospital. The Liberals did give us \$500,000 but the unfortunate thing is this money is still held up with the Ministry of Health. We're working on that right away and also looking at the rest of the \$24 million.'

Another priority nearing the top of the list is securing a new building for Banting Memorial High School, a place he called home for many years in his youth.

'My first elected office was Prime Minister of the Model Parliament in Grade 9 and I was student Council president a number of years. Near to my heart is to get that built. We're making progress because the school board has it fairly high on their list and I am going to try to give it a nudge here at Queen's Park. It is long overdue.'

Mr. Wilson, along with the rest of the Provincial Cabinet, was sworn in on June 29, both inside the Legislature, and at a second ceremony held for the public on the lawns of Queen's Park. It was a unique experience, says Mr. Wilson, particularly the energy

from the assembled crowd, and the overwhelming mandate both he and the party received on the election night has only heightened the already high responsibility he feels to voters.

?Absolutely, the buck stops with us and we know that,? says Mr. Wilson about being in a Majority government. ?You campaign hoping that that is actually the outcome because you want to make a difference. It was a tough 15 years in opposition. I used to say I wore kneepads to work every day because I was basically begging all the time. Now we're in charge and we'll hopefully get credit for the good things we do and have to take responsibility for things that don't go so well.?