

Rookies rush to Liberal aid

The Daily Courier's top 10 stories of 2009 continues with the story of 3 first-timers

By J.P. SQUIRE
The Daily Courier

All three incumbent Liberals in the Central Okanagan decided not to run for re-election in the May 2009 provincial election.

As a result, three novice MLAs won seats in the Legislature. And two of them were named to Premier Gordon Campbell's cabinet.

"It has been a very exciting and challenging time learning the role of MLA and cabinet minister," said Kelowna Mission MLA and Minister of Agriculture, Steve Thomson.

"I remain proud and honored to be part of the Okanagan team of Liberal MLAs in Victoria. We follow in the footsteps of previous MLAs who have provided great service to the Okanagan and the province. I am mindful of the great responsibility that we have been entrusted with."

The three MLAs participated in their first throne speech, budget presentation and the fall session of the Legislature, he said.

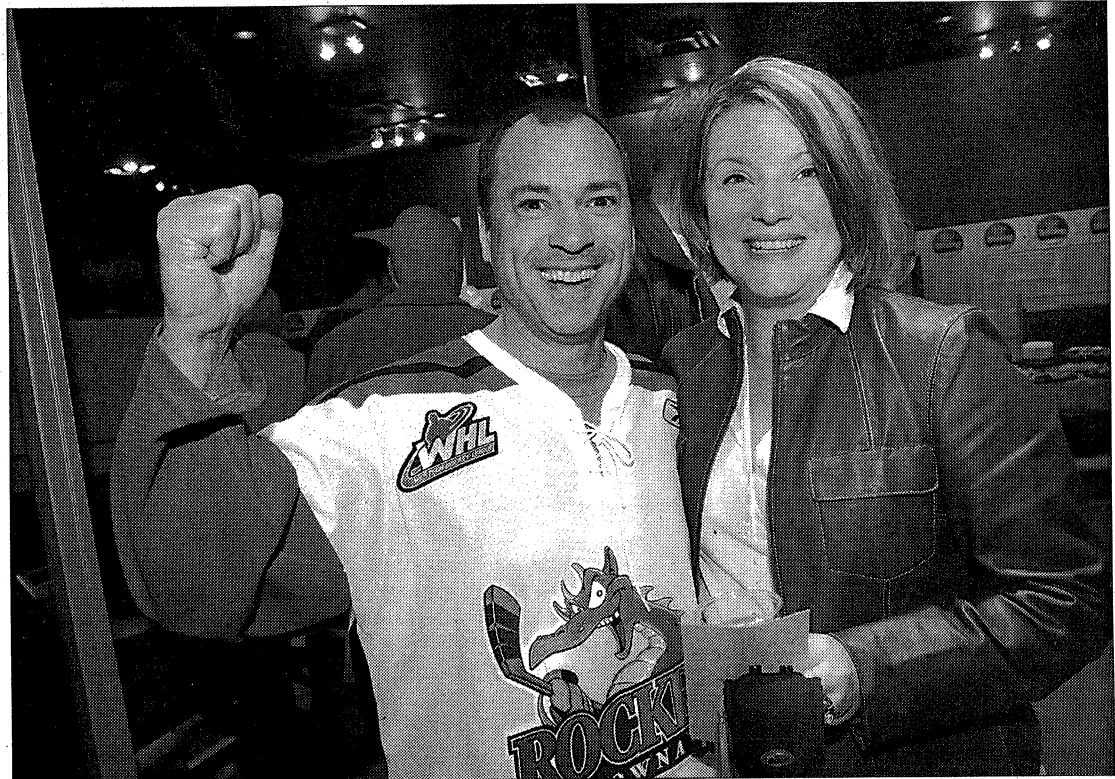
"It has been a rewarding experience, and I have learned that decisions we make that are good public policy are not always politically popular and that it is important to focus on longer-term objectives."

His priority is establishing a foundation for economic recovery and job growth that will provide the provincial revenues to ensure the provincial government can address important needs in health care, education and social services.

"Local priorities include water policy, diversified sustainable economic development, infrastructure needs in transportation and affordable housing, and advancing our leading educational facilities at all levels," he said.

Kelowna-Lake Country MLA Norm Letnick has much the same sentiments.

"Every time I walk into work at the Legislature, I am humbled by the responsibility of the job I have been



Daily Courier file photo

Kelowna-Lake Country Liberal candidate Norm Letnick is all smiles on election night alongside his campaign manager, Shelley Gilmore.

THE DAILY COURIER'S TOP STORIES 2009

10. The Capozzi Murder
9. New MLAs take office

The series continues on Monday.

given," he said, adding, "I am fortunate that Ben, Steve and I work extremely well together as we serve our constituents."

Their predecessors served the Okanagan well, having established a strong foundation that is helping the Okanagan weather the economic downturn, he said.

"Thanks to their work, we are able to make policy that will help ensure a strong economically sustainable future," he said.

"I have learned since elected that

serving as an MLA is even more rewarding than I imagined.

"Sometimes, good policy isn't always good politics, and there is room for individual voices in our political system."

His priorities include: supporting strong economic policy, maintaining a competitive tax system that encourages investment and jobs, improving health care and education, helping people in need, upgrading infrastructure, supporting agriculture and reducing the negative environmental footprint.

"With new perspectives, we can help develop and achieve our government's vision for the future," said Westside-Kelowna MLA Ben Stewart, who is Minister of Citizen Services and the minister responsible for multiculturalism and the public affairs bureau.

"We are working to ensure a strong, sustainable economy and healthy environment, so that not

only us, but future generations can prosper."

He said their predecessors left "a strong legacy of investment in extremely important infrastructure," including Kelowna General Hospital and UBC Okanagan. "It is our job now to ensure our economy is healthy so we can continue developing these projects."

Since election day, he has learned "this job is challenging and rewarding in that I have the opportunity to use all my skills and experiences developed both in business and in the volunteer sector to serve the people of our province."

His priorities are to help reshape how the provincial government delivers services so that it uses the budget efficiently and effectively.

"Having grown up here, I also want to help build a sustainable, collaborative relationship between the District of West Kelowna and the Westbank First Nation to ensure a thriving community well into the future," he said.

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