

# Barisoff won't seek re-election

**'Incredible journey' of MLA, former cabinet minister and Speaker of the House will end next year**

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Penticton MLA Bill Barisoff ended months of speculation when he told personal friends and supporters Sunday afternoon that he won't seek re-election in the 2013 provincial election. "I have enjoyed an incredible journey in my time as a member of the legislative assembly and watching the Okanagan transform over the past 16 years has been a great honour to be a part of," Barisoff wrote in a column that will run in Tuesday's Herald.

He said he wasn't planning on running again in 2009, but felt there were some projects still in fruition, most notably the Jim Pattison Centre for Excellence at Okanagan College, which he wanted to see completed.

Barisoff was first elected in 1996 as an opposition MLA with the B.C. Liberal party when he defeated NDP incumbent Bill Barlee by fewer than 30 votes.

He was re-elected three times including in 2009 when he secured 44 per cent of the vote, beating challengers Cameron Phillips of the NDP, Green candidate Julius Bloomfield and Chris Delaney of the Conservatives.

In addition to being MLA, Barisoff has been the Speaker of the House since 2005 and the first in more than four decades to be re-elected to the position. He also served as minister of water, land and air protection, and as minister of provincial revenue.

Looking back at the past 16 years, he said in an interview his proudest accomplishments were the Centre of Excellence and SOEC.

"It's a college atmosphere and it's bringing a ton of young people to Penticton and giving them the opportunity you'd normally only get in a place like Kelowna or Prince George or Victoria," he said.

"With the SOEC, going to the final Vees game and seeing 4,800 people watching junior hockey at a facility the equivalent of GM Place is very satisfying. To have shows like Mamma Mia! is a real bonus for not only



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Penticton, but the entire South Okanagan and Similkameen."

Barisoff, born in Oliver, served for 18 years on the Southern Okanagan school board as trustee including eight years as chair before entering provincial politics. He owned and operated his family's trucking business.

In addition to his work for the SOEC and OK College expansion, his other significant projects include securing funding for the a youth skateboard park, a road-widening project between Oliver and Osoyoos, sewage improvements in Okanagan Falls and funding for the Prairie Valley Road improvements in Summerland.

This past term had its share of controversy. Premier Gordon Campbell stepped down when his approval rating dropped to single digits. Barisoff also drew criticism recently for comments made by the auditor general on the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, which Barisoff chaired.

The local riding association will soon call a nomination meeting to select a candidate in May's election. Those rumoured to be interested include Penticton mayor Dan Ashton, Summerland mayor Janice Perrino, former school board chair Connie Denesiuk, lawyer Charlie Albas and businessmen Mark Ziebarth and Jason Cox.

Barisoff said he won't be endorsing a particular candidate noting, "There's some excellent people who are willing to put their names forward. I believe we have an excellent chance of winning the Penticton riding."

As for the future of the B.C. Liberals, Barisoff said he's not worried about their present situation in the polls.

"When I won in 1996, I don't think anyone thought I had a chance. It's going to be a close election, but it will go down to one riding at a time and Premier (Christy) Clark is doing her part. It's going to go down to a lot of hard-work."

Barisoff said he'll remain active in the party, but has no immediate plans. He and his wife, Edna, have three grown sons and three grandchildren ages one through five who all live in the area.

"Between being MLA and on the school board, after 35 years of public life, it will be nice to be able to spend a lot more time with my family. I enjoyed every minute of public life, but it's now their time."