

From the House

By Dennis Bevington MP Western Arctic

Much has been said about the composition of Stephan Harper's new cabinet since the appointments were made by the Governor General on the fourteenth of July. One thing for sure, this is, even more than before, a cabinet belonging to the Prime Minister. The veteran ministers are loyalists, Flaherty, Baird, Clement, Nicholson, Van Loan, Diane Finley and James Moore. Peter McKay, who has moved from Defence to Justice, is less a loyalist as an essential element of the Atlantic provinces representation.

The newcomers, be they Chris Alexander, Michelle Rempel, Shelley Glover, Kellie Leach, or Candice Bergin have all demonstrated a strong willingness to parrot the lines of the Prime Minister's Office on their way up the ladder. One of the new faces, Pierre Polievre has made a career in Question Period by attacking Opposition politicians that ask the tough questions of the Prime Minister.

For Northern Canada, the return of Minister Valcourt, into the hot seat of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, likely means that the PMO will continue to control much of the action in this area. There will be important legislation coming forward from this Ministry, both for Aboriginal issues across the country and for the NWT. For devolution to be a reality in April 2014, a Devolution Implementation Bill will need to show up in Parliament in the fall. As well, the Conservatives have continued to promise changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. My concern is that these separate efforts will be run together in some form of Northern omnibus bill. Another take it or leave scenario for many people in the NWT.

The more significant change in the Cabinet for northerners is the appointment of Nunavut MP and former Minister of Health to the position of Environment Minister. In her five years in Health, her standard position was to refer most health policy issues to the provinces. To her mind the Canada Health Act was a funding device and the Government of Canada was little more than the administrator.

When it comes to Environment, a national and global issue, this approach will have to be abandoned, for her to develop any credibility in the Ministry. After five previous Ministers running Environment for a non-caring prime Minister Harper, this would be a tough assignment for an ardent green person.

The Conservative posture on the north may have moved slightly from the "Defence of Canada's Arctic", to resource extraction and economic development, but the concerns about arctic ice melting and ocean acidification, and climate change mitigation are not part of their public policy discussion.

Minister Aglukakaq has a large hill to climb if she is to make a credible effort in the Environmental portfolio. This at a time when her constituents, most of our country and the rest of the world are demanding more in this regard.