

## Life after losing: electoral defeat brings whole new set of challenges



Defeat for a federal politician means losing a job, social standing and structured daily life. Cellphones get cut off, the paycheques stop, logins won't work and everyone wants them moved out fast. Independent candidate Jane Philpott is hugged by a supporter following her concession speech after losing her Markham-Stouffville seat to Liberal candidate Helena Jaczek in the 2019 Federal Election, on Monday, Oct. 21, 2019. *Chris Young / THE*

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OTTAWA — Brian Murphy barely had time to process losing his seat in the 2011 federal election before the House of Commons wrote to ask if he wanted it back.

There was a catch, however: it would cost him.

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politics, laughs it off now. But he knows first-hand the pain — financial and otherwise — that comes with being unceremoniously turfed from Parliament.

“Not everyone falls from political grace into a windfall.”

More than 1,500 candidates went down to defeat on Monday, 49 of whom were incumbents. Now, a group of ex-parliamentarians wants to help those former MPs figure out where to sit next.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Defeat for a federal politician means losing a job, social standing and structured daily life. Cellphones get cut off, the paycheques stop, logins won't work and everyone wants them moved out fast. They have two or more offices to shut down, mountains of paperwork to navigate and piles of case files that either need to be archived or shredded.

Everyone handles it differently, but for some, “It's like a sort of PTSD,” said Dorothy Dobbie, a former Conservative MP from Winnipeg who was swept out of Parliament in the 1993 Liberal landslide and now serves as president of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians.

Turnover in the House of Commons is among the highest in the parliamentary world — Parliament Hill typically loses 30 per cent of its members after an election, including those who choose not to run again and those who fall short. Many say more could be done to ease the physical and emotional upheaval that ensues.

“You are like a locomotive that goes full blast and then, suddenly and against your will, you have to close your office, your staff lose their

## TORONTO WEATHER

1°C



Partly cloudy

Feels like -5 °C

<b>Wednesday</b>	-3 °C
<b>Thursday</b>	-1 °C
<b>Friday</b>	4 °C
<b>Saturday</b>	4 °C

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The association, established by an act of Parliament in 1996, is launching the first-ever formal mentorship program for outgoing MPs, linking newly defeated members with former parliamentarians who can offer a sympathetic ear and a shoulder to cry on. The group is also working with the House of Commons to improve provisions and career transition services.

Joe Jordan, who served as Liberal MP in the Ontario riding of Leeds–Grenville, said he felt prepared when his loss came in 2004. Some, though, never get over it.

“I’ve seen how devastating political loss can be to people,” Jordan said. “I’ve seen the impact it has on their lives and it’s tragic to see, from attempted suicides to successful suicides.”

Defeated MPs only have 21 days to complete a long list of post-politics chores.

“I have a long list of things to do and I’m not on it,” said outgoing Liberal Stephen Fuhr, who lost his B.C. seat in the riding of Kelowna–Lake Country on Monday.

Fuhr still chokes up when he talks about his staff. He’s hoping Tracy Gray, his Conservative successor, will keep them on, just as he did when he arrived on the Hill four years ago to replace longtime Tory incumbent Ron Cannan.

Fuhr, a pilot, said the initial shock of the loss has since morphed into sadness. He said he’s not sure where he’ll land, but for now he has three offices to shut down.

Even though every MP eventually leaves politics in some way, being unprepared for a sudden loss can cause serious longer-term challenges, said Jordan.

Michael Morden, research director of the Samara Centre for Democracy, conducted exit interviews with over 100 MPs from previous parliaments. The most common regret, he said, was not having an exit strategy.

After Dobbie was defeated in 1993, she was clearing out her office in Ottawa when former Liberal cabinet minister Judy Erola invited her to lunch. For some, Erola told her, “It can take up to 10 years before you are ‘rehabilitated’ in the eyes of the community.”

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his seat. But the help he received from other ex-parliamentarians proved priceless — a favour he intends to pay forward to the next generation of former MPs.

“It certainly did change after not being re-elected — you used to have 3,000 friends, now you have 12,” he said. “It doesn’t come easy. Despite what people say.”

This report by The Canadian Press was first published Oct. 26, 2019.

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