



Municipal experience helps rookie MP

But Burlington MP Mike Wallace finds that it takes a lot longer at the federal level to solve constituents' problems

BY CHRISTINE COX

BURLINGTON Rookie Conservative MP Mike Wallace looks comfortable in his constituency office on the upper level of Burlington Mall.

He's glad he decided to locate there rather than on a downtown street. The mall is easy to find, there's plenty of parking, it's accessible and it's on a bus route.

If we have to have a storefront to promote ourselves, then I don't think we're doing a good enough job," Wallace says.

A spa and modelling agency used to occupy part of the space that is now his office. He shares it with a couple of staff and a fish called Wally.

It has been six months since Wallace, 42, was elected MP for Burlington after more than a decade as a city councillor.



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Mike Wallace finds it exciting to offer his opinions at caucus meetings.

He has found the municipal experience helpful, particularly in dealing with constituents issues. The issues are completely different, but the process is approximately the

same, except it takes a lot longer to solve a constituent problem at the federal level than it does at the municipal level.

Most of the problems his constituents seek help with relate to

paperwork over issues such as immigration, visitors' visas, Canada Pension Plan and income support programs.

When Parliament is in session, Wallace is home with his wife and two teenage daughters only on weekends. The rest of the week, he's putting in 14-hour days and living in a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa. He says he has missed a few concerts and school events, but in general his kids are adjusting well.

He finds it exciting to be part of government, put forward his opinions at caucus and talk directly to cabinet and the prime minister. The biggest change is getting used to the partisanship. It's something he didn't experience at city or regional council, but in Ottawa, it influences basically everything.

Access to staff isn't as easy as it

was at city hall. When Wallace asked to see Treasury Board staff because he had questions, he was told he would have to make arrangements through the minister's office. This kind of protocol is understandable, considering there are 308 MPs, Wallace says.

Using an independent pollster, Wallace is conducting a phone survey to find out if his constituents think the government should reopen the controversial same-sex marriage issue.

He will base his position on the poll and expects to make an announcement in early September.

When Parliament resumes sitting, Wallace plans to introduce a private member's bill to set up a database of DNA from missing persons (obtained from hair or close relatives) that could be cross-referenced with DNA from unidentified human remains

and DNA from crime scenes.

He believes the bill, first put forward three years ago by MP Gary Lunn and known as Lindsey's Law after a missing B.C. teen, has a good chance of passing.

Other priorities this fall include speaking in support of proposed legislation that would regulate railway-related noise. This has become an issue in Aldershot, where CN is working on a third line to expand GO service.

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