

Jay Hill decides to stick with rebel alliance

The Monday morning Alliance deadline came, went and found Prince George-Peace River Alliance MP Jay Hill sticking to his guns. Hill chose to stay with the seven other Alliance MPs who were pursuing co-operation with the Tories over the leadership of Stockwell Day.

"Jay felt there was substantial merit with moving ahead with the Mont Tremblant agreement," says Mike Delaney, legislative assistant to Jay Hill in reference to the parliamentary co-operation meeting last month in Quebec. "The ultimatum was clearly an attempt to stop that movement but Jay's take was that too much had been accomplished up to this point."

The Alliance Party had offered to welcome back wayward members who agreed to cease unauthorized talks

with the Conservative Party and abide by the results of next spring's leadership race by the Monday, 9 a.m. deadline. Hill spent the weekend in his riding considering his decision, then travelled to Edmonton on Sunday.

Hill joined dissident leader Chuck Strahl and fellow rebel MPs Deborah Grey, Val Meredith, Jim Pankiw, Inky Mark, Grant McNally and Gary Lunn in the newly-formed Democratic Representative Caucus. MPs Art Hanger, Andy Burton and Jim Gouk rejoined the Alliance fold, robbing the DRC of the 12-MP membership needed for official party status. But Delaney says Hill isn't worried about being unable to exert influence in the DRC-Tory alliance, especially after being named whip for the 20-member coalition party.

The PG-Peace River MP's rebellion hasn't come without a cost, says Delaney. Membership in the party riding association has dropped by at least half and political donations have likewise declined. Although he retains his Alliance Party membership he is no longer a member of caucus and has no access to party resources.



Hill



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"Jay will still advocate Alliance policy. It will just be from a different platform."

Alliance whip and Prince George-Bulkeley Valley MP Dick Harris says that the passing of the ultimatum and severing of ties with the rebel MPs brings closure to upheaval in the Alliance Party.

"In my mind (Hill) is no longer a member of caucus. He has been expelled for his actions. We're moving on. The people that chose not to come back will be left behind," he says. "There isn't much concern in the party as to what happens to those people."

Harris says that the finality of the decision will free him from the rift that has taken up most of his time since becoming party whip in April. He plans on returning to his riding duties quickly.

"Dealing with this has completely taken my focus off my parliamentary duties and I've had no time to travel my riding. That upsets me," says Harris. "I'll make it up now that this is finally over."

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