

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Oh, Canada!

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Oh Canada! It was a wonderful 150th birthday bash this past weekend. I hope you had a chance to join in the celebrations. I can't recall more enthusiastic crowds. Lots of folk wearing red and white, plenty of flag waving and loud cheers for a great country. And Canada deserves it. You deserve it, because ? together ? we have built a great country, perhaps the greatest. ?Canada has a leading claim to being ? the most successful country on the planet, and the best place to be an average citizen, anywhere, ever,? says the Globe and Mail.

Oh Canada! to that.

Another recent Globe and Mail headline captures more good news: ?Happy birthday Canada. Your gift is an economy on the cusp of a mini-boom ? more jobs, low inflation and rising optimism among businesses.?

When I was considering running for Member of Provincial Parliament I asked residents of our community what kind of society they wanted to build right here in Newmarket-Aurora. This still remains my fundamental question, not just about our riding, but also about our province.

?What kind of Ontario do we want to build? What kind of society do we want to leave our children??

The world is changing. How we work, how we learn, where we live ? it's all changing. And let's be honest ? it's creating some anxiety. Not everyone is benefitting from our expanding economy and we have a long way to go to address the dreadful way Indigenous nations have been treated.

My time at Queen's Park has made one thing crystal clear: there are two, very distinct visions for Ontario.

There's one that our government is pursuing: a province that is inclusive and fair and works hard to provide everyone with the opportunity to become the best they can be.

It's a vision that believes in the inherent goodness of people; a vision that says we are stronger when we stand together; and that, together, we can weather any storm that a changing world throws at us ? and emerge stronger.

Our vision is for a society that brings people together in times of anxiety and challenge. What kind of Ontario do you want to see?

I want a place everyone can call home, where people can put down roots, just like my wife, Audrey, and I did here in Newmarket-Aurora close to 30 years ago; where we chose to raise our three children; because we loved the community ? its people, its history and its attitude.

I believe you can measure the priorities of a government by what it chooses to invest in.

Talk is cheap. Action speaks. Our government is delivering the change people want in our society by investing in the people of Ontario ? in the people of Newmarket-Aurora. Whether it be jobs, health care, education, transit or environment, we are focused on making your life easier. Let me give you a few examples from our most recent budget ? a budget that, as promised, is balanced. We've introduced pharmacare ? providing full coverage of prescription medications for everyone under 25. I believe this will be the catalyst for a national program.

We're improving local healthcare by delivering an additional \$5.7 million to expand service and shorten wait times at Southlake Regional Hospital. This funding takes our commitment to Southlake to \$286-million a year.

We're making housing more affordable by implementing Ontario's Fair Housing Plan to increase predictability and affordability for homebuyers and renters.

We're investing in education by funding \$800 million in capital projects and school renewals in York Region, including schools in Aurora and Newmarket, while delivering free tuition for over 210,000 post-secondary students across Ontario.

Locally, I've pushed hard on other issues important to you. We're building more transit: Metrolinx has approved a Mulock Drive GO Train station that will give us direct access to and from Union Station. (The opposition's transportation critic was criticizing this ? but the residents of this riding sure aren't!)

We're helping make your voice heard regionally by passing legislation to democratically elect the York Region Chair. That was my first Private Member's Bill and it was adopted as part of a larger government bill.

We're making our community more liveable through better urban planning by making changes to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) that will give local residents more say in how their communities grow. This is an issue I identified years ago as a Town Councillor in Aurora. Rehabilitating the OMB was one of the issues that motivated me to run provincially.

We are protecting the beautiful Oak Ridges Moraine. I know how important the Moraine is to folks in this riding and how important

the environment is in general. We are protecting MORE green space through the legislation.

The final word to the Globe and Mail: "More than a hundred years ago, Sir Wilfrid Laurier said that Canada would one day be the star toward which all those who love progress and freedom would come. It was long taken as an absurd boast, but like the words of the anthem, it has turned out to be true. Around the world, people dream of a place like this. To live here is to be the recipient of incredible good fortune. It also makes you the trustee of a living thing that must be preserved, expanded, improved and enriched ? and passed on to the next generation."

Oh Canada! indeed.