

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: A look back at the Fall Session

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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The very productive Fall session of the Ontario Legislature recently ended. It saw the passage of 19 bills and another eight bills introduced. The bills covered everything from finance to an update of the Housing Act, to mandating the direct election of York Region's Chair (an idea I introduced through a private member's bill).

Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act, will reduce electricity costs by eight per cent before tax, a saving for the average Ontarian family of \$130 annually. Rural consumers will see a decrease on their bill by an average of \$540 annually. The province has spent billions building a modern, secure and clean electrical system after years of neglect and unreliability, but making sure electricity remains affordable is also important.

Bill 7 was also passed ? a bill that is very important to me. The Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016 amends four different acts to help increase affordable housing and modernize social housing. These changes will be made by giving municipalities the option to implement inclusionary zoning, making secondary suites in new homes less costly to build and will give local service managers more choice in how they administer housing programs and services to reduce wait list times and encourage more inclusive communities.

This session has also seen the introduction of some great private members' bills. In Ontario we continue to recognize and celebrate our diversity with the introduction of several heritage recognition months. This session also saw the introduction of the Protecting Reward Points Act and the Remembrance Day Act, 2016. The Children's Law Reform Act is one that I have heard many times at my constituency office, this act ?Recognizes Relationships with Grandparents.? This act clarifies that grandparents have the ability to seek an order for access to their grandchildren, while ensuring that the courts remain focused on the best interests of the children.

CHPI Funding for York Region

This past week I had the honour of announcing that the government of Ontario would be increasing its investment in York Region to help individuals and families stay in their homes and get much needed housing. This investment was made through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), the total investment means that York Region will receive \$52.5 million over four years. This is a significant increase to allow the Region to continue its work in the areas of preventing homelessness and helping those who are homeless. Last year this funding helped 519 families from across the York Region move from homelessness, emergency shelters and transitional housing to long-term housing, and it helped an additional 1,410 families and individuals remain in their homes. These initiatives can include financial assistance and education programs to help prevent eviction, long-term and transitional housing with related supports and emergency shelters for those experiencing a crisis, including youth.

Queen's York Rangers Cadet Dinner

An annual event I really enjoy is the Queen's York Rangers Cadet Holiday Mess. This year, Audrey and I enjoyed guest speaker Kenneth Brown, former Cadet Regimental Sergeant Major. Ken talked about the importance of the cadets and how it helped shape him, by giving him confidence in himself and helping him to build leadership skills. It also gave him a lifetime of great memories. (And he met his future wife through the program.)

Whether the Army, Air Force or Navy stream, the cadets program is a wonderful organization that teaches and reinforces leadership skills, self-reliance, and physical fitness. Most importantly, it teaches respect for self and others. Aurora has both an Army Cadet Corps. and an Air Force Cadet Corps.. I encourage you to learn more at: www.cadets.gc.ca.

Goodbye 2016 ?

This is my final column for 2016 and it's an opportunity to thank all those who make this riding of Newmarket-Aurora so special. A special thanks to my constituency office team who work tirelessly and often go beyond the call of duty as they work on your behalf to answer questions, solve problems, and generally clear the lines of communication with all levels of government. We track the issues coming into the office and I regularly stand at caucus to report on what's of importance to local residents. I couldn't do it without great staff. Thank you Brian, Trish and Rohit.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.