

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Year of Opportunity

A Year of Building Opportunity

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

Recently, the Ontario Legislature rose for its holiday break, giving me more opportunity to meet constituents, attend community events and spend time with family and friends.

The end of sitting is also an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of our government in 2014 and look ahead to the ways we will continue building opportunity and security for the people of Ontario in 2015.

This has been a very productive six months for the government of Ontario on behalf of the people of Newmarket-Aurora, and all Ontario.

Since the session began, we introduced and passed our budget and nine other pieces of legislation that build opportunity and create more security in people's lives.

We raised the minimum wage to \$11 and tied it to inflation.

We cut red tape for businesses and passed legislation to combat auto insurance fraud and lower your rates.

And we are helping kids get the best start in life by investing in their education and health.

The budget is central to our government's four-part plan to build Ontario up by investing in people's talents and skills, developing new public infrastructure like roads and transit, creating a dynamic, supportive environment where business thrives, and building a secure retirement savings plan.

There are positive signs that our plan is working.

Employment in Ontario has increased by 517,400 since the recessionary low in June 2009. Premier Kathleen Wynne's first trade mission to China in October resulted in nearly \$1 billion of new investments by Chinese companies, creating 1,800 new jobs for the people of our province.

Our Youth Jobs Strategy is on track to create employment opportunities that are giving thousands of youth a foothold in the job market, and time and time again, companies are choosing to invest in Ontario, creating more opportunities for the people of our province.

A year ago, I was an Aurora Councillor and enjoying my 25th anniversary as president of a local small business. And a year ago at Queen's Park, our Liberal team was facing a challenging minority parliament.

What I saw was a government working in collaboration with the opposition to move forward with initiatives important to me and the people of Newmarket-Aurora.

The year got off to a great start when the province's largest coal-fired station, Nanticoke Generating Station, burned its last coal and went out of service. Three months later, Thunder Bay Generating Station burned its last piece of coal and Ontario became the first place in North America to eliminate coal as a source of electricity ? the single largest climate change initiative undertaken in North America.

In the spring, when the other parties decided not to support the budget, we went to the polls. I ran to serve as your MPP because I believe in Premier Wynne's practical and balanced plan to build Ontario up ? and because I believe I have the skills and experience to make a real contribution on behalf of the people of Newmarket-Aurora. I am excited to have the opportunity to deliver for you and proud to serve as your MPP.

When our party was given a majority mandate, we got right back to work. We reconvened the legislature within a few short weeks and we passed the budget in July.

While I am encouraged by the progress people are seeing, I am also working to address the challenges that people in Newmarket-Aurora face, such as transit, transportation, environmental preservation and local economic growth.

I was delighted with GO Transit's increased train service to our riding in the summer, but more needs to be done and I will continue to advocate on behalf of this riding.

I am excited with the work I am focused on at Queen's Park, namely working with Minister Deb Matthews to help move the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy ahead, and with Minister David Orizetti, to help make it easier for small business to do business with the province.

A big issue, both here and across the province, is retirement security. We know that fewer than 35 per cent of Ontario workers enjoy the security of a workplace pension plan and that a significant portion of today's workers are not able to save enough to live

comfortably in retirement. We listened, and we acted.

Before rising, our government put forward the first piece of legislation required to make the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) a reality, beginning in 2017. The reward for a lifetime of hard work should not be a retirement defined by financial insecurity.

There is no question that 2014 was a building year: building on your strengths, building opportunity and security, building roads and transit, and retirement security. Six months into Premier Wynne's majority mandate, the work we are doing together to build Ontario up is just getting started. I look forward to continuing to serve this riding.

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