

MP's REPORT: Encouraging Youth Contribution

By Leona Alleslev, MP
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As a mother of two teenaged children, I understand that sometimes our youth feel that they are not recognized as contributing members of society.

However, I believe that our youth are not only our leaders of tomorrow, but are leaders in our community today. So, during the month of February, Youth Achievement Month, I decided to focus on engaging with our young leaders in the conversation on how they are contributing and can continue to contribute their maximum potential to society.

I also want to encourage you to do the same - speak with the young Canadians in your network; engage them in important discussions, ask for their opinions, and work with them so together, we can define and achieve a brighter future for tomorrow. We can learn from the younger generations, and in that light, instead of writing an article on what I am doing, I chose to feature the opinion of a member of our Constituency Youth Council.

Read below to see what Nadia Narain (member of Aurora-Oak Ridges- Richmond Hill Youth Council) has to say about youth involvement, Canada's international role, and how our Youth Council is working to connect the two?

The millennial generation is often marked by our desire to contribute something of value to humanity. Many of us joined the Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill Youth Council because we wanted, in rather clichéd but no less substantive terms, to 'make a difference' in our local community and country.

However, what precise difference are we looking to make? The second meeting of our constituency's Youth Council was, in my opinion, one step closer to discovering and implementing an answer to this question.

During our Council's second meeting on the topic of Canada's international reputation, we agreed with pride that Canada's reputation on the global stage is that of a country that acts with diplomacy and respect for its allies and opponents alike in every instance. Especially in light of the current precarious state of global politics, it is apparent that Canada's talents in collaboration and cooperation are needed now more than ever.

In his final presidential address, the former US President Barack Obama implored the American nation to inform themselves of the existence and content of various competing viewpoints, regardless of how initially counterintuitive they may be.

I think Canada can take note of this statement and recognize that in order to rectify the deficiencies that threaten to divide us, we must make an effort to act solely in the spirit of collaboration that earned Canada its sterling international reputation.

Our Council's discussion also elicited the point that Canada's strong international reputation begins with our behaviour towards and amongst fellow Canadians.

Your constituency's Youth Council is leading by example on this front.

The Youth Council is an enterprise that is based on discussion, not debate. The success of its participants does not depend on how well they can articulate their point to win an argument, but how meaningfully they can contribute to a discussion to develop effective solutions to pressing global issues. This is not to say, however, that the Youth Council is devoid of challenge. On the contrary, its members' perceptions are often tested by the experiences, opinions and points of view held by other members. In essence, the Youth Council gears its participants to operate in an environment that rewards collaboration, not polarization, and encourages youth to build upon each other's contributions to engage in more informed and balanced analyses. The discussions, led by our MP Leona Alleslev, are practice for the kind of thought and behaviour that is needed to build a more united world.

So, although I may not yet have a precise answer to the question of 'what difference are we looking to make?' in collaborating with other youth in our community to address social issues, discuss effective solutions, and promote cooperation in our ever-changing and often isolated world, I feel more confident and better equipped to meet this challenging task.

Accordingly, to any young Canadian who wishes to make a difference in society, it is my sincere and heartfelt recommendation that you seek to join your constituency's Youth Council as soon as you possibly can.

Nadia Narain is a Member of the Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill Youth Council. She is 21 years old and has recently obtained her LL.B. from University College London in the UK.