

Van Bynen reflects on six years representing Newmarket-Aurora



As candidates hit the campaign trail for the April 28 Federal election, Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen is reflecting on six years on the job.

Van Bynen has served as the riding's Member of Parliament since 2019, when he was elected to replace MP Kyle Peterson, who opted not to seek re-election that year. Similarly, Van Bynen announced he too would not seek re-election last year, vowing to serve until the end of his term.

That term has come to an end with Sunday's election call.

"First and foremost, where did those six years go so quickly?" he said with a chuckle. "It's reflecting back on the things we have been able to accomplish over the years and quite proud of what we have been able to do. Equally important is the daunting task of getting ready for the next election and how do we make sure that everything we have worked for over the last six years is sustained and becomes engrained as part of Canadian values and the Canadian way of life."

The long-time Newmarket Mayor had been in political retirement after twelve years in that municipality's top job before he considered a Parliamentary run. He said a fear of progress being "at risk" is what spurred him to put himself forward as a Federal candidate once Peterson's decision was clear.

"I just wanted to make sure the progress that had been made up until 2019 was not going to be at risk and at that point in time decided that the best way to ensure that is to stand as a candidate and make sure that at least Newmarket-Aurora was seen and heard in the House and were successful in sustaining government as well," he says.

He jokes that Peterson painted "a much brighter picture than what unfolded."

"He had no knowledge of what was going to change, but I think everything that we've had to deal with was pretty much driven by some of the crises we've needed to face," he reflects, noting the plane shot down by Iran over the country as one of the first "high-tension circumstances we were facing in the House at the time."

A meeting he attended at which Dr. Theresa Tam warned the government that a Global Pandemic was likely coming with COVID set the stage for another challenging chapter.

"The following day the House was suspended, we were sent home, and then we were on fast forward in terms of how do we make

government work when all of the members are dispersed. That led to some very progressive innovation that we are seeing the benefit of now and that is remote government, remote voting and those kinds of things. The Global impact of things where your scope and scale was broader and more diversified across Canada, and then reaching into global issues is the most substantive difference.?

Van Bynen served on Parliament's Health Committee in his first term when the Pandemic was at its height. He also served on the National Security Committee when it was dealing with issues related to handguns and assault rifles.

?There are a number of things I am glad we made really good progress on. Specific issues that I advocated for personally, and we saw successes in was?the budget funding that was established for disability benefits and that process and how well that was established in the budget; our team and Ian (Proudfoot) specifically on behalf of our team was engaged in a study and advocacy on not-for-profits during COVID. [We talked] about the scope and the scale of non-profits and how they were being impacted and that led to quite a significant commitment in the budget that went directly to non-profits. These organizations that were receiving declines in revenues and increasing demands, so the responsiveness there was necessary.

?There was another study we initiated that related to intergenerational volunteerism and the government now has undertaken a study to determine the effect of intergenerational volunteerism and to develop a strategy. We're getting into an aging population where the youth today have different perspectives towards volunteerism. My wife, for example, has been volunteering for the hospital probably close to 10 years whereas the general tendency today is for youth to get involved with the project. Once that project is done, they will move onto another project. It is that long-tenured volunteerism that is critical to places like the hospital, long-term care facilities, etc.?

Another area of interest and advocacy is what is termed Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities and how they can be supported.

As he looks ahead to retirement himself, for a second time, he anticipates ?losing 20 pounds and wearing out two pairs of shoes? as he canvasses for Newmarket-Aurora Liberal candidate, Jennifer McLachlan, but he's also reflective on the government he leaves behind.

?The Prime Minister's (Justin Trudeau) leadership was best displayed when we were dealing with crises. My very first exposure was when the airplane was shot down in Iran and how he brought the country together, how he was able to stabilize the concern, the anxiety as a result of that. I am sure everybody will remember the days when he walked out of the cottage and spoke in public during COVID and those, I think, are times when the Prime Minister's concern about the collectiveness of the country and the way that we need to support each other really shined the best. Those are things that I think were key. It was an important strategic decision to have the arrangement with the New Democratic Party in this last term so critical things that were important to both parties would be able to go forward and out of that came dental care, pharmacare, and ten-dollar-a-day childcare. Those are three important things with some degree of compromise we will be able to advance those initiatives. They say politics is the art of compromise and the supply and confidence agreement was an important step forward there allowing us to accomplish a lot.?

Addressing the community as a whole, he adds: ?We're facing some significantly trying times with substantive risks and we need to make absolutely sure that as we go forward we think about making a decision during the next election that it is an informed decision and it is a decision that talks about the values that you as an individual and which party for government best represents that. It's a time to think about who knows the community and what have people have done?to demonstrate their care for the community and demonstrate their willingness to make a difference for people who need our support the most. I think those are things that need to be considered going forward. I have always said that we have to have some fiscal responsibility and I think that is critical, but not at the expense of creating a social deficit. What we need to make sure is we support individuals that know that balance going forward.?

By Brock Weir