

June 2011

June 13th

I believe it is important that as members of Parliament we not only listen to the concerns of the citizens who elect us, but also that we share those concerns in Ottawa as well. Over this past week my office has received a number of questions and concerns regarding the census that has been taken place over the past several weeks. Much of the concerns relate to reminder notices being sent out to households that have already submitted their census, sometimes even multiple times. This in turn creates a concern that either their census submission has not been received and processed or that there is waste of taxpayer resources in sending out these reminders. My family has also received such a reminder note even though it was sent in close to a month ago. I have raised this issue with the Minister responsible to ensure that there is awareness about them.

Another area of concern for many citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla is gas prices. While we have seen some good things over the past few years in terms of reducing the government's share of gas taxes through the reduction of the GST from seven to five percent and beefed up enforcement measures of faulty scales at the pump, it is still a growing concern. The Hon. Tony Clement recently shared these same concerns and as a result has invited refiners, distributors and retailers to appear in Ottawa to answer question on this very subject. I will be reporting back to you with the information and answers that arise from this upcoming meeting.

I was glad to be in Ottawa on Friday evening to hear a speech from my predecessor, the Hon. Stockwell Day. Stock, as he is affectionately known by many on Parliament Hill, spoke about a number of important points:

Living in a country of free speech and the importance of showing respect for others and their views

The rise of China and need for to work on our competitiveness as a country through education, productivity and innovation

And the three people who most influenced his political career, to the surprise of many they were not former politicians or world leaders, but rather constituents he met along his journey in Provincial and Federal politics. Stockwell`s lasting point was to recognize his biggest supporter, his wife Valorie.

In my travels around Ottawa I have come to realize and appreciate what a popular and significant influence that Stockwell had with many colleagues and staff here on Parliament Hill. The parting thought that Stockwell left with me is to never forget that it is serving the hard working people who have made this country one of the freest, most prosperous and peaceful places on Earth that we should never take for granted.

June 21st

This week our Government will introduce Legislation with an intent to put an end to the current Canada Post impasse. This will likely also create my first opportunity to vote on an important issue that I know people within Okanagan-Coquihalla have different and in some cases strong views about. I would like to say that I value Canada Post and believe it is an important service for all Canadians to depend upon. However, I also recognize that a major service disruption would not only adversely impact many Canadians, it can also harm the long term viability of Canada Post as many citizens increasingly look for paperless alternatives in their day to day lives. I believe that as elected decision makers we must make take action to protect our Canadian institutions such as Canada Post and we must also protect the greater interest of all Canadians.

I am mindful that my position on this will not sit well with some members of the public, and in particular many within organized labour. There are legitimate concerns about the right to strike. As Canadians we have many rights afforded to us and these rights also provide entitlements for us but we must also be mindful of not just of our own rights, but also of our responsibilities. Our responsibilities to our country and to our fellow Canadians. In this case, I have heard from involved workers on both sides of this debate including those who are in support and those who are opposed to this legislation. I have also heard concerns from many citizens ranging from delays in financial assistance payments to important medical lab test results being delayed. Hearing these concerns and also believing in the importance of the long term viability of Canada Post I do intend to vote in support of legislation that will put our national postal service back to work serving the interests of Canadians.

Late last week I had an opportunity to witness our Canada Action Plan in action at ribbon cutting events both in Okanagan Falls and with Chief Johnathan Kruger at the Penticton Indian Band. In Okanagan Falls we helped open a new cross laminated timber manufacturing plant. This is an exciting and innovative product that will not only create more jobs in Okanagan Falls, it will also help revitalize our forest industry. Initial demand for cross laminated timber is already sufficient that plant expansion is now a topic of discussion. That is good news for job creation in Okanagan Falls and elsewhere. The second event was the opening of the new Outma Sqilxw Cultural School at the Penticton Indian Band. This is simply put an amazing new school and one that I know band elders, children and families can be immensely proud of. This will be an important legacy asset for future generations.

As the House of Commons is soon to adjourn it is my goal this summer to visit every community and region within the riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla. If you would like to meet me with me at your home, business, coffee shop or wherever else please send me an email to help prepare a schedule of when I will be in your community. Emails can be sent to Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca

July 2011

July 5th

This past week was a very enjoyable one being back in the riding for Canada Day and getting a chance to visit communities such as Peachland, Okanagan Falls, Summerland, West Kelowna and Penticton. I would also like to sincerely thank the organizing committee for the Westside Daze event in West Kelowna for putting on a great celebration and for providing me with such a warm welcome. A good time was enjoyed by all who attended and the cake was great as well.

Over the past few weeks one of the more common concerns that I have heard from many of you across the riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla is over Bill C-428. For those of you unfamiliar, Bill C-428 was a Private members bill introduced by former Federal Liberal MP Ruby Dhalla. This bill called for amendments to the Old Age Security Act that would see newly arrived citizens entitled to a monthly pension payment after just three years of residency instead of the current ten year requirement. It should be noted that this bill was introduced into the former 40th Parliament and has no official standing in the current 41st Parliament. In the event that a similar bill was proposed by another member and based on the overwhelming opposition that I have heard from so many of you I would not be in support of such a bill.

Another topic of concern that I heard about in my recent door knocking travels was related to illegal human smuggling and related jumping of the cue in immigration matters. Canada has some of the most generous immigration laws in the world and yet there are those will attempt to profit or circumvent our immigration laws solely for personal gain. These acts can not only put lives at risk, they can also unfairly impact those who are legitimately going through the process and following the rules and procedures. Our Government is taking action and has introduced Bill C-4 Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act. This act will create new tools that will allow Government to have more flexibility to respond to these situations should they arise in the future. Criminals who profit from human smuggling, should not be able to do so at the expense of Canadian taxpayers.

In my last MP report I mentioned that I was intending to use much of the summer as an opportunity to meet people from across our riding. I am pleased with the warm response of my listening tour thus far but I would like to again ask individuals, not- for- profits, businesses and local government representatives to meet with me and let me hear your thoughts, views and priorities. We live in a unique and diverse riding, one with many points of view that need to be heard- and voiced to Ottawa, so please contact my office at 250-770-4480 or via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca

Although I have been your Member of Parliament for a relatively short period of time, every moment has been rewarding and enjoyable in spite of being a very steep learning curve. I am certainly not alone; according to a recent report, our newly elected Parliament is a younger and more diverse one with a record number of female MP's and more members from careers other than law or medicine which was not the case in Parliaments past. What doesn't change is that all of us must work together constructively. Debate through dialogue and agreement into action are hallmarks of what has made this country great; we all must make sure that future generations inherit a Canada that we can all be

proud of.

July 11th

Last week's MP report to you resulted in one of my first dealings with our national media. As a city councillor I often worked with local media and enjoyed getting to know the many personalities that make up our local print, radio and TV voices. So I was most happy to participate on a live radio program to discuss my latest MP report, specifically on concerns that I had heard about human smuggling.

There was some surprise expressed that the taxpayers in Okanagan-Coquihalla took issue with immigration system being manipulated by criminals trying to illegally smuggle in human cargo for profit at the same time as also trying to jump the immigration line. The manipulation of our immigration system by criminals for profit at the expense of Canadian taxpayers is subject that many have told me they would like to see our Government take action on.

As we got further into the interview, it seemed that there was a misunderstanding as to the reasons for my writing a regular weekly MP report. While some might comment that it stands as an electioneering tool or an opportunity to rain my opinions down from a bully pulpit, I would humbly submit that by the very title of MP report, that I am reporting to the citizens that I represent. To be held accountable as your Member of Parliament, to report on my activities, ask for input and validate what I have been hearing. I have heard (from a variety of sources) that the distance from here to Ottawa is 3,000 or so kilometres but the distance from Ottawa to here seems to be more like 30,000. By submitting these reports, attending community events and other tools like door knocking, help to make sure that I am on the right track.

Listening and reporting are not just commitments that individual MP's make; as a government we recognize the wide diversity of Canada and that those closest to the challenges and the opportunities are the ones we must listen to. Thus the Parliament of Canada's Standing Committee on Finance is asking for taxpayers to share their ideas at the annual pre-budget consultation hearings. Submissions can be made in person or in writing. The deadlines to participate are as follows:

- July 29th is the deadline to apply to appear in-person, as this fall the Committee is scheduled to visit numerous cities across Canada. If you wish to appear before the Committee, please contact the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance (see contact information below) before July 29th and indicate three locations where you are willing to appear.
- August 12th is the deadline for written submissions. Submissions should be no longer than five pages in length, with up to three recommendations that reflect your ideas on taxes, potential new investments, or cost savings related to the federal government. Please send the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance your submission (along with your contact information) before August 12th.

The Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance

Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street

House of Commons

Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Canada

Tel.: 613-992-9753 Fax: 613-996-1626 E-mail: FINA@parl.gc.ca

There will always be debate as to what are the best ideas to carry Canada forward. What is truly unique about our country is that we always develop ways and means for everyone to have their say and to test and challenge those ideas. We can all feel proud that when the last spike is hammered, the last soldier returns home or the last vote is counted, that we all had our part in it.

July 18th

A few different topics for this week's MP report, so stick with me!

One of the questions that I have received from many of you pertains to the very popular ecoENERGY retrofit program. In particular many homeowners were interested to learn when the 2011 ecoENERGY program applications would be available. I am pleased to report back that the ecoENERGY program applications are now available online at www.ecoaction.gc.ca/homes or call 1-800-O-Canada (800-622-6232). I strongly encourage interested citizens to act quickly to take advantage of this program.

For those of you unfamiliar with the ecoENERGY program, homeowners are eligible to receive grants of up to \$5,000 to make their homes more energy-efficient. To date roughly a quarter million homeowners are paying less and helping to conserve energy at the same time. In addition the ecoENERGY program has also helped to generate over \$ four billion in economic activity and has assisted many homeowners in not just lowering energy costs but also helping to increase home equity. Please note that there have been some changes to the 2011 eco ENERGY from previous years including a new requirement for participants to register directly with the program prior to booking a pre-retrofit evaluation.

Another concern that I have heard from some citizens about is in regards to a recent tax compliance initiative by the United States government. The United State Internal Revenue Service has indicated that it will begin to enforce requirements that American citizens residing outside of the United States provide more detailed financial information on an annual basis. This enforcement would also apply to US Citizens holding joint citizenship with other countries including Canada. As a result of this intended enforcement action, a number of different but important concerns have been passed on to me in particular from those in the banking and financial services community. Late last week the IRS announced that it will delay this enforcement action until 2014. Our Federal Minister of Finance, Hon. Jim Flaherty is also aware of these concerns and has committed to working with the American Government to find a workable solution for all involved.

I have previously stated in my reports that Ottawa may be only 3000 km or so away, but sometimes to the people of Okanagan-Coquihalla it can feel more like 30,000 km. This makes it all the more important for Federal, Provincial and Municipal elected officials to work together with local community groups to make sure our priorities are reflective of the people we serve. In a recent meeting that I attended, it was refreshing to meet with Mayor & council, representatives from the chamber of commerce, economic development committee and a broad spectrum of not for profits who were able to brief me on the various initiatives they have undertaken. It says a lot about a community when you have sixteen volunteers willing to take several hours out of their busy day in order to meet and collectively work on a project that will be of benefit to their community. Meetings like these will become increasingly more important as we seek to balance our Federal budget in 2014, while addressing our communities needs, not its wants. To do otherwise may leave a greater burden of debt to our children and grandchildren. That is not only untenable but unacceptable. We must work together on common challenges while recognizing that there is only one taxpayer and to focus on priorities. Our children and our country deserve nothing less.

August 2011

August 1st

Many of us have heard the expression "there is only one taxpayer". As much as there is only one taxpayer, here in Canada there are three layers of Government providing services that ultimately are funded through a variety of different types of taxation taken from taxpayers. As an elected official one of the first things I have learned is that the spending of tax dollars is generally far easier than raising taxes to pay for that spending. It is a problem that many governments, not just those in Canada, but worldwide are currently struggling with as government revenues in many cases are not keeping up with government spending. This obviously creates a serious problem and requires either increases in revenue through taxation or decreases in spending or some combination of both. Yet finding decreases in government spending is easier said than done and ultimately if left unchecked, it can lead to increases in debt.

I believe that debt is something that we all need to pay more attention to. Many of you may be aware of the current debt struggles in Ireland and Greece, where those countries share of gross debt has now well exceeded one hundred percent of the respective Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Having said that, how many of you are aware that the United States has now reached a point where the projected gross debt for 2011 is forecast to be a one hundred percent share equal to the GDP? This is an increasingly serious situation and more so as countries that we compete with, such as China and India, have considerably lower debt levels with China at just 17% gross debt against GDP and India at 69%. South Korea as another example sits at 29%

Here in Canada our current gross debt to GDP ratio is roughly 84%. The good news is that our budget deficit between April and May from this same time last year has shown a decrease, largely due to increased revenues up close to 3 percent from both personal and corporate taxes. The importance of jobs and a strong economy cannot be overstated in helping to maintain important government services. Moody's Investor's Services has also confirmed Canada's current economic direction by renewing our triple A credit rating.

I raise the issue of debt because it is important that government at all levels make efforts to control spending. Recently I had the opportunity to visit one community and met with a few interest groups who were promoting projects with a combined price tag in excess of \$40 million. In both cases the local government was unable to contribute so the expectation was that higher levels of government might step in to make up the shortfall. As much as these were both great projects that the community in question would enjoy, we must also learn to live within our means. We can consolidate and often use existing buildings as opposed to constantly building bigger and building new. If one community cannot afford a one third share of a project perhaps the project should be scaled back to ensure it's future sustainability.

Ultimately as a country we must all be willing to do our part in our communities to ensure that we keep spending in control. Every dollar of increased debt means that tax dollars that should be used to fund core services such as healthcare, education and infrastructure as examples, are instead diverted to pay for the debt interest. The higher our debt, the greater the interest payments and less tax dollars available for other services. Over time this situation can create the need for drastic actions

that can potentially threaten the viability of the services we depend upon. We must also recognize that important projects that help to increase government revenues ultimately help fund the very services we all depend upon. Keeping Canada strong will continue to be a priority of our Government and working in partnership with our communities we will continue to build upon the success of our great country.

August 19th

I have over the past few weeks discussed the topic of larger debt and increased government spending as well as the serious challenges that can be created if this situation is left unchecked. There is a temptation in government to build newer, larger buildings and mega projects or to create new and expanded programs.

Often we tend to forgo examining current infrastructure and programs to ensure that those dollars are being used wisely or if there may be greater value in an existing taxpayer investment that we can benefit from today. I am encouraged to share with you one such example this week, of a long term government asset potentially paying dividends to our region.

Many area residents within Okanagan-Coquihalla are likely familiar with the Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre located in the hills above Trout Creek just off Highway 97.

However, what may be less familiar is the important work that is conducted here, supported largely by your federal tax dollars. Last week I was honoured to represent Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz in presenting a relatively modest \$ 261,000 grant in support of research being conducted in partnership between Innovative Food Systems Corp and scientists at the facility. This research can have a significant impact on our local fruit growing economy as you will soon learn.

One of the current challenges with freshly picked fruit is that it typically has a shelf life of roughly seven days. In order to access larger and more profitable markets, shipping must be done either by air for international delivery, or via truck for the North American markets.

Both options are extremely expensive and time sensitive. Imagine if a new innovative antimicrobial packaging system could prevent fungi, mould and bacterial growth and ensure that fresh fruit remains fresh for upwards of twenty five to thirty days. Not only does this technology preserve ripe fruits, it also helps prevent costly waste. This increase from roughly one week to one month means that marine shipping can now be an option for international markets and rail for those elsewhere around North America.

Decreased shipping costs allow growers to more economically access and capitalize on global demand. Marine and rail transportation are also more environmentally friendly and can reduce carbon emissions by roughly 60% when compared to existing shipping options. Food safety is also increased as this technology can protect food from many common pathogens and that in turn may help reduce healthcare costs.

The Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre in Summerland represents a significant investment of our tax dollars over time. However the experience and expertise of the staff and infrastructure of this facility are important assets for our region. In this case it is encouraging that a partnership with industry in support of our local agricultural community can, in turn, enhance our regional economy, all done locally. The Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre in Summerland will be holding an open house towards the end of September and I would encourage all citizens to attend and learn more about this unique facility.

August 29th

Over the past few weeks I have greatly appreciated hearing from many citizens who have taken the time to share their concerns with me. Although the concerns may vary, I have noticed a trend where improved communication on the part of the Federal Government could help to provide more clarity in many situations. One area I continue to hear a strong amount of concern over is Bill C-428. For those of you who may have missed my July 4th Member of Parliament report, Bill C-428 was a private members bill introduced by former Federal Liberal MP Ruby Dhalla. This bill called for amendments to the Old Age Security Act that would see newly arrived citizens entitled to a monthly pension payment after just three years of residency. It should be noted that Bill C-428 died on the Order Paper when the former 40th Parliament was dissolved earlier this year.

Another Bill that I have also heard concern expressed over is Bill C-51. Although Bill C-51 also died on the Order Paper, it is a Bill that the Government intends to reintroduce in due course. The concerns expressed to me regarding Bill C-51 pertain to the security and confidentiality of the internet, internet service providers and your personal information. Many citizens are apprehensive that personal information may be disclosed without due process and judicial oversight. At the same time many are also concerned with the ability of law enforcement agencies to tackle internet crime that can include child pornography, pedophilia, copyright infringement, hacking, and identity fraud among other issues. The need to provide the required tools for law enforcement and also a safe and secure online environment for all Canadians without compromising privacy concerns is an important one.

Bill C-51 would allow for a temporary data preservation order to be made in connection with an investigation. However a data preservation order should not be confused with data retention. Data retention, a concern I have heard mentioned often, is not contemplated with Bill C-51. The purpose of a data preservation order is to ensure that information vital to an investigation cannot be deleted prior to law enforcement securing a search warrant or production order. It is also important to recognize that for this preserved information to be viewed by law enforcement officials that judicial authorization would first have to be obtained. To be clear, a court order, authorization or warrant would be required to obtain any information with respect to an investigation. Law enforcement agencies would not be allowed to obtain the content of a citizen's private communications without first obtaining judicial authorization to do so.

The intent of Bill C-51 is to strike an appropriate balance between the need to protect the safety and security of Canadians, in particular vulnerable youth, and to safeguard the privacy rights of law abiding Canadians. If you have further comments or concerns on this or any other Bills before the house please do not hesitate to contact me. As your Member of Parliament I value your views on these important matters.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

September 2011

September 5th

This week I will be back in Ottawa in preparation for the fall sitting of the House of Commons that will formally resume on Monday, September 19th. With me will be the book of condolences, cards and other mementos that many of you took the time to share in the memory of Jack Layton. I consider it an honour to deliver these condolences to his family. Many citizens have remarked to me that they are glad to see so many of their fellow Canadians across the country set aside partisan differences during this time of reflection and recognize Mr. Layton's life of public service. I would like to thank those of you who dropped by my office with a card or note and also who took the time to sign the book of condolences as it travelled around the area.

Also travelling back to Ottawa with me this week are the many responses and suggestions I received from citizens as part of my summer listening tour. I would like to thank those that offered kind words of encouragement and warm wishes for my new position working on your behalf in Ottawa, and also for telling me what you think are issues of importance to you. Issues that were mentioned most often were crime and the justice system, the need to control government spending, gas prices, the environment and employment. Many citizens also voiced their support for senate reform as well as the removal of the long gun registry. Concerns with other levels of Government were also common as was immigration policy. I welcome your input and will share your concerns with my colleagues in the weeks and months ahead.

One serious item of concern that did arise last week was the prospect of an NDP motion being put forward by MP Libby Davies that would have resurrected much of former Bill- 428 in seriously reducing residency requirements in order to collect OAS and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Fortunately the NDP quickly withdrew the motion referring to it as an error in submission. Rest assured in the event that this motion or a similar one is introduced, I will be proud to represent the citizens from Okanagan- Coquihalla and stand with my Conservative Government colleagues in opposition to such a costly and irresponsible assault on taxpaying Canadians. I believe that those citizens who have worked hard for ten years or more paying taxes and contributing to Canadian society should be entitled to receive Old Age Security and a Guaranteed Income Supplement and cannot support this residency requirement being removed or reduced for newly arrived citizens. This is one issue that I have heard overwhelming on from many citizens all across the riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla and all comments I have received have been in strong opposition to any reduction in the residency requirement to qualify for taxpayer funded requirement benefits.

As the House of Commons will soon be in session I intend on keeping taxpayers up to date on new bills before the House. If there is a particular bill that you would like further information on, or to be covered in one of my MP reports please do not hesitate to let me know. Once I am back in Ottawa I will also be more active again on my daninottawa.com blog site. As your elected Member of Parliament it is important to me that you can keep track of my activities on your behalf. My email

address is Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca and I welcome your comments.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

September 12th

Since becoming your Member of Parliament in Ottawa I have come to accept that travelling has become a large part of my life. Travelling around the riding and of course flying back and forth between Ottawa and Okanagan-Coquihalla are weekly and sometimes daily occurrences. That is what made this past September 11th such a thought provoking day for me. I cannot begin to imagine what it must have been like to have been a passenger aboard United Airlines flight 93, who had been hijacked and learned in short order that the hijackers intended to use the plane as a weapon of death and destruction to kill hundreds and possibly thousands of innocent people. Those passengers decided that as members of a free and democratic society they would fight back and ultimately sacrificed their own lives in order to save the lives of others.

This past Sunday I attended a memorial service at Penticton's restored Veterans Memorial Park beside the Penticton courthouse. Veterans and first responders attended to dedicate a First Responder Cairn, out of respect for the sacrifice of the many RCMP, fire fighters and paramedics who gave their lives so that others might live. My visit to the park reminded me that it was not just on September 11th that lives were lost in the fight against tyranny and oppression in the defence of a free and democratic society. Veterans Memorial Park, and others like it, are a reminder of our proud Canadian history for standing up to fight for our great country and the values we all share as Canadians. I realize that it may not be Remembrance Day, but I believe it is important that we are always mindful of the immense sacrifices that came before us and that we never forget the past and the need to work together for our future.

Last week I was back in Ottawa for our government caucus retreat and much of our discussion revolved around legislation and policy that will be on the agenda for the upcoming fall sitting of the House of Commons. The retreat also provided an opportunity to meet with several ministers directly and share concerns that have been relayed to me by constituents. I was very encouraged to learn that in spite of the vast size of the Government of Canada, the Ministers I spoke with were very approachable and well briefed on the issues I brought forward on your behalf. In the coming weeks I will be able to share further information on some of the issues currently being worked on in Ottawa. Once the House of Commons resumes I will also work hard to share with you details and information on new Bills that are introduced into the House and will be available to respond to any questions or enquiries that you may have. I believe that communication is very important and that taxpayers deserve timely information to stay informed on issues that are of importance.

September 20th

This week is a busy one back in Ottawa as the House resumed session on Monday morning. The House of Commons stood united as leaders from all parties marked the opening of Parliament with a tribute to the memory of Jack Layton. Question Period is often the most covered in the media however there are many parliamentary functions of lesser notoriety where Parliamentarians do indeed work together in a much more civil and constructive manner. The comments reserved in memory of Jack Layton served as a reminder that all members of parliament are elected to serve the public and though we may at times disagree on the means to achieve that goal we must always be mindful of the need to be respectful and constructive in our dealings.

The introduction of Government Bills will also be heavily on the agenda for this week including many Private Member's Bills (PMB). It should be noted that PMB's serve the public interest by giving rank and file MP's the opportunity to propose legislative changes. Private Member's Bills generally fall into two categories, the first category applies if a Bill calls for the expenditure of tax dollars, in such cases there is a constitutional requirement that a Royal recommendation would apply and this can only come from Government through a Minister. In other words a Private Member's Bill cannot force a Government into a public spending commitment without the support of Government. The second and more common type of Private Member's Bill may reduce a tax, or impose or increase an exemption from taxation, or suggest another action of government. There are currently roughly seventy Private Member's Bills being proposed with topics as varied as "An Act to establish Leif Erikson Day" to "[An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 \(prohibition against the transportation of oil by oil tankers on Canada's Pacific North Coast\)](#)".

There are far too many Bills to individually reference in this report, however if there is a specific bill you would like further information on please do not hesitate to contact me. I also follow your comments and email closely and if there is a specific Bill (such as the now defunct Bill 428) that attracts a significant amount of inquires I will reference it in my future MP reports. Aside from Bills, Members of Parliament may also introduce a Private Member's Motion into the House. A motion can cover a wide range of different issues that typically attempt to propose an opinion or direction for a course of action to Government. Motions, unlike Bills, are generally less specific in details. It should be noted that Government is not bound to adopt a motion from a private member. That being said, a Private member may give notice of a motion requesting specific papers or documents be compiled or produced by the Government to be tabled into the House. If such a motion is adopted, the requested action can be carried forward.

PMB's are but one of the many fascinating aspects to our Parliamentary system. PMB's offers Members of Parliament the opportunity to build awareness around an issue or direct legislative change. While many are not passed, some are later adopted by government. Private Member's Bills are as varied and diverse as the hundreds of ridings across Canada and represent the full spectrum of ideas from throughout our great country.

September 26th

With the House now fully back in session, it has been another whirlwind week in Ottawa. Most notable was a special address to Parliament by British Prime Minister David Cameron. Although the media characterized this speech as being primarily focused on the world economy, there were other important and overlooked topics that are deserving of mention.

It is often said that as Canadians we are our own toughest critics. There are some days in the House of Commons where the discussion and debate does not acknowledge that ours is truly a great nation that continues to help make the world a better place. It was refreshing to hear David Cameron share a different perspective, some of the history of Canada's contributions and sacrifices on the world stage for the betterment of others. Indeed sometimes in the heat of House of Commons debate we as Parliamentarians forget that Canada has in fact charted a course that other nations continue to struggle to set.

History aside though, we must also be mindful of the future. Prime Minister Cameron remarked on the importance that as countries we must keep our citizens safe and we must work hard to ensure there are jobs. To achieve these goals we will need to work together and recognize that debt is the crisis that can no longer be ignored. We must also prioritize our spending wisely and recognize that international aid and helping to educate the youth in developing countries are investments today that can yield long-term benefits down the road. Diplomacy and international investment must be measures not overlooked given the immense cost, on all levels, of military campaigns.

In order to tackle the debt crises we must stay focused and apply strong leadership. We cannot ignore today's problems as they will surely become larger problems tomorrow. Tackling debt will not be easy but it is important that we demonstrate strong political will. There were those in attendance for the speech who clearly did not agree with the comments from the British Prime Minister. From my perspective I believe that David Cameron's speech is an important one, and I say that both as a Member of Parliament and as a Canadian. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to hear and ponder some of the challenges that we will all face in keeping Canada and our allies strong. I am also thankful that the majority of those in the House of Commons are united to work in this regard. On a daily basis I meet many of my caucus colleagues from around Canada and am greatly impressed with the dedication and passion of those MPs with whom I am fortunate enough to work..

As David Cameron reminded us, during some of the world's darkest times, Canada was there and continues to defend and uphold freedom, democracy and the rule of law, the values that shaped this great nation. After hearing the British Prime Minister's Speech I felt proud to be a Canadian.

This week in the House the debate will focus primarily on Bill C-4 Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act and Bill C10, The Safe Streets and Communities

Act. Also this week will be debate on a motion to extend the mission in Libya for a further three months. If you would like further information on any of these or any other Bills please contact my office at 250-770-4480 or toll free at 1-800-665-8711

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

October 2011

October 4th

Since becoming a Member of Parliament I have discovered that the topic of urban legends can also apply to proposed Bills and legislation before the House of Commons. It is understandable that in a democratically diverse country such as Canada, citizens will from time to time agree to disagree on the direction and policy of Government. However that disagreement should be based on the facts and not rumor or inaccurate information. Government also has an important role to play in communicating factually accurate information in a timely manner.

One of the recent bills that I have received a fair amount of inquiry on is the newly introduced Bill C-11, An Act to Amend the Copyright Act, also known as the Copyright Modernization Act. It is well known that Canada's existing copyright laws are woefully out of date and have not kept pace with recent advancements in technology that include MP3 players, PVR's and other electronic devices including software and in many cases related hardware. Contrary to popular opinion expressed by some, the new act does not call for a citizen to be "arrested" or fined for copying a personal CD collection onto an MP3 player. Rather the Act proposes to legitimize many day to day activities that are common among Canadian consumers.

Recording TV programs, copying music, backing up software or other data and even posting a mash-up on a social media site are all permitted activities under the Bill provided the intent is for non commercial purposes. What has changed? Canadian creators, performers and artists will now have more legal rights and protection as well as additional control of how copyrighted material can be made available on the internet. In support of these enhanced protections, there will now be more significant penalties for those individuals who choose to engage in accessing unauthorized copyrighted material that includes either the circumvention or "breaking" of digital locks including the importation, sale or manufacture of devices designed to break digital locks. In summary the intent of this legislation is to protect everyday consumers who have legitimately acquired copyrighted material and wish to copy or duplicate that material for personal, non commercial use. As this is a brief summary of Bill C-11 If you would like further or more detailed information please contact my office.

Also this week I had an opportunity to introduce my Private Members Bill C-311 that, if passed, will create a personal exemption under the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act. This act contains a prohibition era law that makes it illegal for a citizen to transport a bottle of wine from one Province to another. For many of our Okanagan based wineries selling wine to customers in other Provinces is illegal because of this 83 year old law. If this exemption can be passed, it has the potential to open up

the Canadian marketplace and provide consumers across Canada more choice and access to wines from our outstanding Canadian wineries, many located here in the Okanagan. While the Bill has only reached the stage of first reading, it has so far been well received and supported by many of my colleagues from all political stripes. If you would like to support Bill C-311 you can join the "End wine prohibition in Canada" Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/endwineprohibition) or visit my www.daninottawa.com website for further information including a link to the Facebook campaign.

If you would like further information on any of these or any other Bills please contact my office at 250-770-4480 or toll free at 1-800-665-8711

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

October 10th

This week is the Parliamentary Thanksgiving break week with Parliament not sitting again until Monday, October 17th. As I will be back in the riding for the next several days I would like to hear from you. If you would like to schedule a meeting or have time for a phone call to pass on your comments and concerns, please call me in my Penticton office at 250-770-4480 or toll free at 1-800-665-8711. Last week I had my first opportunity to speak in favor of a Bill in the House of Commons. Bill C-13 is the "Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs growing Act" and features the next phase of our Economic Action Plan. This was a very rewarding experience for me as many of the aspects contained within Bill C-13 are what I campaigned on during the past election. The Temporary Hiring Credit for Small Business, the permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in the Gas Tax fund, the family caregiver tax, and the new children's arts tax credit are just a few examples contained within Bill C-13 that many citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla were supportive of.

There are two other aspects of Bill C-13 that I am very excited about as they will benefit our region very positively. One proposal would create an extension for the mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through share investors by one year to support Canada's mining sector. This policy supported by the recent announcement from the Premier of British Columbia to provide more resources to help the opening of eight new mines can lead to significant job creation. Communities such as Logan Lake and Princeton and surrounding areas can attest to the importance of mining activity within the region. Further away, it should also be noted that one of Okanagan Falls largest private sector employers also caters to the international mining market. Mineral exploration leads to mines and mines lead to well paying jobs and mineral resource royalties that also support Government programs.

Another aspect of Bill C-13 that will be beneficial to our region is a proposal to extend the accelerated capital cost allowance for investments in manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment for a further two years. Investments in equipment and machinery is important because machinery and equipment are what create jobs. In June I attended the grand opening of the new cross laminated timber manufacturing plant also in Okanagan Falls. One exciting new piece of equipment is the Grand Master, it is the world's largest planer and it not only creates jobs, it is helping

to create an innovative new product that can lead to more jobs even in spin off industries. Bill C-13 will not only support jobs and our local economy, it will also help to provide a balance assisting families and seniors to improve their quality of life.

Many of you have also asked about my Private Member's Bill (C-311) calling for an end to Canada's Wine Prohibition in Canada. While we in the Okanagan are familiar with the economic opportunities for opening up our Canadian wine market to consumers, there are a surprising amount of other regions around Canada that also have an emerging wine industry. Many of them have also shared the frustration of being able to ship a bottle of wine to Texas but not being legally able to ship wine to another Canadian Province simply because of this 83 year old prohibition era law. Initial support for Bill C-311 has been thus far very encouraging from my colleagues and I will continue to work hard in an effort to see my Private Member's Bill passed.

October 17th

This week I am back in Ottawa and the House is again in session after Thanksgiving and a week of activities in the riding. I had a chance to meet with many constituents and also attend a few meetings and events around our region. Some of the topics I heard about from citizens included the Air Canada labour dispute, challenges with immigration and more specifically deportation, and requests for information about current, previous and potentially incoming bills. I have also been asked when certain bills pertaining to specific areas such as the Long Gun registry will be introduced.

This week, aside from continuing debate on already introduced Bills, the legislation to provide marketing freedom to western Canadian wheat and barley farmers will be introduced into Parliament. Although I have not heard extensively from local citizens on this issue it is expected to involve a fair amount of debate on Parliament Hill. Also getting underway is debate on some of the Private Member's Bills that have been introduced over the past few weeks including my Bill (C-311) calling for an end to wine prohibition in Canada. There are roughly 12 Private Member's Bills that are expected to have some second reading debate prior to the next break of the House for Remembrance Day. If there is any Bill you would like further information on or would like to see covered in one of my weekly MP reports please do not hesitate to contact me through my Penticton office at 250-770-4480 or toll free at 1-800-665-8711

Some good news for Canada this past week as Forbes Magazine ranked Canada as the best place in the world for business to grown and create jobs. Over the past two years Canada has created over 650,000 net new jobs but as we also witnessed recently in protests around Canada there are still those who are looking for work and we must continue to work on lowering our national unemployment rate. This week in the House of Commons we will vote to continue to move Bill C-13 forward. I believe this is an important Bill and will help to create more jobs in our region. Although we have much to be thankful for, we must continue to build on the success of our great nation.

During my week back in the riding I could not help but notice the gathering of election signs around our region. In most every community citizens are coming forward to stand for public

office. It was only three years ago that I was out doing the same, and again more recently in the Federal election. Running for office takes more than just courage, it also requires volunteers and for many candidates, financial resources as well. Although some people dislike election signs, always remember that each sign represents a fellow citizen who is giving of their time to stand for office in an effort to build a better community. I believe it is a positive sign that many citizens are taking an interest in the local government elections in November and I am hopeful that residents come out and vote in support of this important democratic process.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

October 24th

For many citizens in this riding and across Canada this week on Parliament Hill will be one that has been long awaited. This week legislation will be introduced that will fulfill a campaign commitment with respect to the long gun registry. Since becoming elected as a Member of Parliament, the two issues that I have most heard from citizens on includes widespread opposition to former Liberal Bill 428, (that I am pleased to report it now defunct) and an overwhelming support for an end to the long gun registry. As the Bill to end the long gun registry is still on order paper and has not yet had first reading I cannot confirm the Bill number however I will share this information in next week's report. Over the past few months while the House has been back in session I have greatly appreciated hearing from citizens all across Okanagan-Coquihalla with questions and comments for the various Bills before the house. Another Bill that I can report on is my private members Bill C-311 to put an end to wine prohibition in Canada. Last week second reading debate began on C-311 and it was an extremely heartening experience for me to learn that the members from the NDP and both a member from the Liberals and Green Party were all in favour of sending C-311 forward to committee stage. I am hopeful that Bill C-311 will be heading to Committee Stage before the Christmas break.

On the subject of Bills, excluding Private members Bills, there are currently eighteen different Government Bills that have been introduced into the House during this 41st session of Parliament. Of that eighteen, five have been granted royal assent and the remainder are either at first or second stage reading and related debate. Clearly there is still much to be done in the weeks and months ahead and this is one of the reasons why time limits are sometimes put in place to allow some bills to move forward in a timely manner. With Private members Bills, there are fixed time limits in advance and at all stages of debate to help ensure that as many different members as possible have an opportunity to move a bill forward, subject to the list of consideration that contains the order members are drawn in the private members bill lottery. Although I was originally drawn as 12 out of 239 members, an opportunity arose that allowed my Private Members Bill to move forward to the #1 position meaning second reading debate began last week instead of later in November as was previously the case. If you have any

questions on private members bills or related procedure please contact me at your convenience.

I will next be back in the riding the week of November 6th to November 12th, and would like to hear from as many of you as possible. If you would like to schedule a meeting please do not hesitate to contact my Penticton office locally at 250-770-4480 or toll free at 1-800-665-8711. If you would like more timely updates on my activities in Ottawa you can also visit my www.daninottawa.com blog site or you can subscribe to weekly updates at www.danalbas.com . I look forward to seeing many of you whether at a meeting, public event or just out and about in the riding.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan- Coquihalla and can be contacted at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

October 31st

Last week was another busy one in Ottawa as several important Bills were introduced into the House of Commons. For those of you unfamiliar with the stages of Bill passage, a Bill is always entered into the House for first reading. It is the custom of Parliament to unanimously support all Bills for first reading at such point the contents of the Bill then become available for reading. Although a Bill at this point can be unanimously voted to be sent directly to committee stage, generally second reading debate occurs where members of the House will decide after the debate if they agree to move a Bill on for committee stage.

Committee stage is the process where a Parliamentary Committee examines the contents of a Bill and will typically invite witnesses with expertise in the related field to examine the technical and legal aspects of the Bill in question. The Committee has the power to make amendments or revisions in the Bill before it is referred on for report stage. At Report stage Parliamentarians will again examine the contents of the Bill and decide if it requires further amendments before being sent on for third reading debate. Third reading is essentially the final look at a Bill by members of Parliament and should the Bill pass third reading it will then be referred to the Senate where a similar process will begin all over again. In short while the term slam dunk is sometimes applied to legislation, it is a very involved process with many important steps of review occurring before a Bill is passed into law.

Two Bills introduced last week also fulfill campaign commitments from the last election, Bill C-19 "Ending the Long Gun Registry Act" and Bill C-20 "Fair Representation Act" are both commitments that many Canadians and citizens from Okanagan-Coquihalla have expressed strong support in. While Bill C-19 is somewhat self explanatory in ending the long gun registry, Bill C-20 is deserving of further explanation. I have heard from seniors in particular of the frustration from many previous Federal elections being all but over once the Ontario elections polls closed. Western alienation is not a new sentiment nor is it a factually inaccurate opinion. In spite of living in a democratic society that is governed by representation by population, in Western Canada we have in fact been unrepresented compared to many Provinces across Canada. While increasing seats in some Provinces and decreasing the seats in others may seem

like a more obvious solution, various clauses within the Constitution Act provide seat guarantees in some provinces that prevent such practices from occurring.

In order to ensure greater democratic equality, seats will be increased in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario and to a lesser extent Quebec. While Quebec will receive three new seats, both British Columbia and Alberta will receive six new seats each while Ontario would gain fifteen new seats. These changes will more fairly balance the percentage of the Canadian population in each province with the percentage of seats within the House. By adding 27 seats outside of Quebec the proportional share of the seats in the house will increase for B.C., Alberta and Ontario and at the same time will decrease in Quebec and the Maritime Provinces more closely following actual population. If you would like further information on either of these Bills please contact my office at 250-770-4480 or toll free at 1-800-665-8711

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November 2011

November 7th

The House of Commons will not be in session for Veterans week and will resume sitting on Monday, November 14th, 2011. For the duration of this week I will be attending close to thirty different meetings and events throughout our region with stops in Merritt, West Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland, Penticton and Okanagan Falls. Two of these events involve waste water treatment that as infrastructure projects are either soon to get underway or have reached completion. While it is encouraging that these types of projects are getting completed on time and on budget, what I enjoy most during my travels throughout the riding is meeting with taxpayers and hearing firsthand what concerns and events are occurring in our local communities.

The past week on Parliament Hill was an unusual one. While an overwhelming number of citizens have taken the time to voice support for the elimination of the long gun registry, the opposition has taken the position to oppose efforts to wind down the registry. That said, two NDP MP's did not agree with the NDP position on the gun registry and instead voted with Government in favour of elimination. In response both NDP MP's were punished by the NDP and various penalties were imposed on them. However that was not the largest issue of the week as the vast majority of political debate from both the NDP and the Liberals was focused on our new Auditor General Michael Ferguson, who will be replacing recently retired AG Sheila Fraser. The opposition was not angered over the competency or integrity of our new AG but rather that Mr. Ferguson has only recently begun lessons to speak French and is not yet fully bilingual. The Liberals have suggested they may pursue legal action over this matter.

While those issues occupied most of the headlines and airtime during question period, one of the most interesting experiences I have yet had on Parliament Hill was to view life in Parliament from the perspective of a wheel chair as a volunteer in the "chair leader" for a day event. The Canadian Paraplegic Association hosts this annual event with MP's from all political stripes who agree to spend the day in a wheelchair for the duration of our parliamentary duties. This is a brief

but very important chance to see life from a very different viewpoint. While there is much to be said on this topic, I will summarize to say that the amount of obstacles I encountered in such a short period of time has given me a whole new level of understanding for the daily challenges that disabled Canadians face on a daily basis. What was most surprising was the amount of wheelchair accessible infrastructure that proved to be inaccessible for a variety of different reasons. This is an issue that I believe needs to be paid greater attention to in all of our communities and regions.

As this is Veteran's Week I would like to ask all citizens to take part in your local Remembrance Day ceremony in your community. While I still have much to learn as a new Member of Parliament, the opportunity to meet with democratically elected MP's from all across Canada speaks of the diversity of this great country. As British Prime Minister David Cameron recently reminded the House of Commons, in the world's toughest times and darkest hours, Canada has always defended democratic freedom and fought against tyranny. As Canadians we have been defined by the sacrifices of the brave men and women who serve in honour of our nation. In an era where some are content to protest in wanting for more I submit that on this Remembrance Day we should all give thanks to our veterans for all that we have. May we never forget.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan- Coquihalla and can be contacted at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

November 14th

Although the House of Commons is back in session this week, I greatly enjoyed the past seven days back in the riding of Okanagan- Coquihalla during last week's Parliamentary break. While some believe that Members of Parliament only work when the house is in session the reality is that breaks provide for an opportunity to travel to communities within our ridings and meet directly with taxpayers to hear from citizens firsthand. For me, this is a very important part of being your Member of Parliament and to ensure that the work we are doing in Ottawa will be of benefit here in our region and elsewhere across our great country.

One of the highlights from last week was a visit to an under construction Silver Mine near the community of Merritt. While not a large mine, currently close to a dozen workers are involved in the assembly of roughly six million dollars worth of milling equipment. When this mine is up and running the workforce will increase to over sixty people and will represent roughly a \$15 million dollar annual investment into the local Merritt economy. What is also exciting about this new mine is that roughly 30% of the workforce will be from the first nation's community. Merritt has long been a resource based region and it is encouraging to see new investment creating well paying jobs and I wish the mine operators full success in this new operations.

In West Kelowna one of the concerns that I have heard from many citizens pertains to a possible land exchange between the Provincial Government and the Westbank First Nation. While it is important to recognize that this is an issue the ultimately the Provincial Government maintains jurisdiction over, there is some general information I can pass on with respect to the process

from the perspective of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. In the event that a First Nations Government passed a band council resolution (BCR) formally requesting an addition to reserve (ATR) this would create the need for an environmental site assessment (ESA) As part of this process, consultation with local government would occur. It is also important to recognize that the Westbank First Nation is self-governing and has the authority and mandate to make decisions on behalf of the membership and this includes entering into agreements with the British Columbia provincial government.

Before I close I would like to pass on wishes of good luck to all candidates running in next weekend's local government elections and also I would like to encourage taxpayers to vote for the candidates you feel can best represent you. It was only three years ago that I was elected to city council and can say from experience that every vote and every decision matters. I attended several all candidates forums in the past week and found many candidates that are well informed on local issues and are ready to serve. Please take the time to vote.

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November 21st

Concerns over retirement and pensions are ones that I hear often from groups and citizens in our region. This past week in the House of Commons our Government introduced new legislation with respect to Pooled Registered Pension Plans (PRPP's). While Canada's current retirement income system has been recognized around the world as a model that succeeds in helping to reduce poverty among Canadian seniors, there are still challenges that remain. In recent years, Government has introduced a range of new and expanded measures to continue to provide supports for retiring workers and seniors.

Recently, our latest budget also announced a new Guaranteed Income Supplement top-up benefit for Canada's most vulnerable seniors. More than 680,000 low income seniors are eligible for additional annual benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples. In addition, our recent budgets have provided about \$2.3 billion in additional annual targeted tax relief to seniors and pensioners through measures such as pension income splitting, increases in the age credit amount, and a doubling of the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit.

While progress has been made, we must also recognize that roughly 60% of Canadians do not have a workplace pension plan. Obviously these are not public sector workers but rather workers in the private sector. One of the major barriers in providing pension plans is the significant legal and administration costs that are very prohibitive for small business employers. This is where the new Pooled Registered Pension Plan (PRPPs) can be of assistance. PRPP's will allow many small business owners and their employees to have access to a large-scale, low-cost private pension plan. Professional administrators will ensure that funds are invested in the best interests of plan members and by pooling pension savings, PRPP's will create greater purchasing power. This can achieve lower prices than would otherwise be available and this can result in greater returns and ultimately more money for workers when they retire. The design of these plans will also be

straightforward to allow for simple enrollment and management and looks to be largely harmonized from province to province to help lower administrative costs and simplify the process.

While PRPP's can potentially be of benefit to many workers in the small business sector, it is important to recognize that this new plan is one of many tools designed to help assist Canadians workers and their families. In our most recent budget, (Bill C-13), our Government has proposed the family caregiver tax credit, the children's arts tax credit, a tax credit for small businesses when they create jobs and making the gas tax fund permanent. While these are all programs that I have heard strong support for by citizens here in the riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla, at the same time the passage of Bill C-13 has been delayed during prolonged debate in Parliament. Recently Government introduced time limits on specific debates such as Bill C-13 in order to see the budget passed and taxpayer's receiving some much needed tax relief in specific areas. To date there have been 100 different speeches in the debate on Bill C-13, each with a section for question and answers or comments, including my own. While some may disagree, I believe that Budget 2011 should be passed and implemented in 2011. It is also important to recognize that once a bill like C-13 is passed in the House of Commons it proceeds to the Senate for yet another level of debate and potential passage before receiving Royal assent.

It is my observation that there is plenty of opportunity for discussion, debate and disagreement in Ottawa. While we may continue to struggle with passing a budget bill within the same year it is intended, let it never be said that the people's house lacks passion for a better Canada.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan- Coquihalla and can be contacted at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

December 2011

December 5th

In my relatively brief time as a Member of Parliament I have observed that when there is a lack of information that void is filled very quickly with misinformation. Case in point is Bill C-10, otherwise known as the omnibus crime bill. Some would have you believe that the intent of this bill is solely about incarcerating anyone and everyone convicted of committing a crime, regardless of the severity, and essentially throwing away the key. I believe it is important to talk about the types of serious crime that are actually being targeted in Bill C-10.

Child Pornography. If you choose to manufacture or distribute pornographic material involving children you can expect a minimum six month jail sentence instead of the current 90 day maximum. Engage in sexual assault against a child and you will go to jail and no longer be eligible for house arrest. "Date Rape" drugs will now be recognized for the real danger they can present to innocent victims. These types of crimes are not restricted to larger urban areas, families and innocent victims have been subject to these types of serious crimes here in our riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla. I have met with victims and attended events that focus on victimization and the cruel impacts of sexual assault. Those who have had suffered these types of traumas are understandably looking for changes and greater protection to the public from sexual predators.

Bill C-10 also addresses other subjects that many citizens have requested action on. For example Bill C-10 will ensure that those who commit manslaughter or aggravated assault will no longer be able to return to the community under house arrest. I can pass on from a recent experience in

one Okanagan residential neighborhood that when a killing has occurred and the alleged assailant is allowed to return to the community in question this situation creates fear and anxiety for all involved.

Everyday law abiding citizens should not be afraid for their own safety or the safety of a loved one nor fear being able to go for a walk or visit friends and neighbors.

Two of the most common areas of misunderstanding about Bill C-10 pertain to increased enforcement penalties for drug offences, including marijuana, and a belief by some that there are no rehabilitation aspects to Bill C-10. With respect to increased penalties for drug trafficking, it should be noted that these increased penalties only apply under specific circumstances. Drug trafficking that involves organized crime, threats of violence and the use of a weapon all fall into this category. Likewise trafficking drugs in or near a school or other area where children are present will also bring about increased penalties. As for rehabilitation, Bill C-10 allows a court to suspend a sentence while an offender undergoes a court approved drug treatment program as permitted under provincial jurisdiction. These programs encourage offenders to deal with the addiction that often motivates criminal behaviour. If the offender successfully completes the treatment program, the court may impose a suspended or reduced sentence.

I recognize that there are some who believe that criminals and sexual predators are better off in our communities and not in jail where they cannot reoffend. Some citizens believe that criminal's rights should come before those of victims. In a free and democratic country as great as Canada it is expected that citizens will have different views on many important subjects. To be clear Bill C-10 ensures that the rights of victims will be put ahead of the rights of criminals when dealing with serious crimes. This is a commitment and priority that my Government takes seriously and one that many citizens have requested action on.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan- Coquihalla and can be contacted at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

December 14th

The Attawapiskat First Nation may be thousands of miles away from our region of Okanagan-Coquihalla, however living conditions in that community are a concern that many local citizens have directly raised with me. It is an issue that many citizens have expressed some strong views about and I have also had many requests to include this topic in my weekly MP report. This is undeniably a very important topic and one that I know many Canadians take very seriously. No Canadian takes pleasure in witnessing poor living conditions and rampant poverty within our great nation and likewise Canadian taxpayers desire accountability and to know that our tax dollars are being well spent. It is clear that in Attawapiskat we are failing to get the results that Canadians taxpayers expect from Government. In terms of your tax dollars, over \$90 million, the equivalent of \$ 54,000 for each man, woman and child living within the Attawapiskat first nation has been transferred to the band leadership. I have taken the time to read the financial

statements from the Attawapiskat First Nation. While there is undeniably a shortage of acceptable housing in the community, there is no shortage of governance. A former chief, an acting chief and a deputy chief lead a band council that had a total of 19 councillors receiving some form of payment during the last fiscal year. On the school and education board there were a further 12 board member positions receiving payment. Collectively these expenses are part of a \$3.2 million administration budget for an on reserve population of roughly 2000 residents. We must also be mindful of the fact that this situation has developed while the Attawapiskat First Nation has been under co-management for the past decade with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

While it is important to identify challenges, we must also expand our focus beyond the failures and recognize the need to find workable solutions beyond the status quo. It is clear that there are no easy answers to this challenge. Yet we do have many successes stories within our First Nations communities and perhaps it is time we also focus more on what is working, as opposed to solely what is not. We are fortunate in the riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla that many of our First Nations have had greater success in creating jobs and prosperity. That is not to say that there are not still challenges remaining, but collectively leaders such as Chief Clarence Louie from the Osoyoos Indian Band and Chief Robert Louie from the Westbank First Nation have been extremely successful in creating jobs and increasing outside revenue for their respective bands. I am also pleased to report that a recent meeting with Penticton Indian Band Chief Jonathan Kruger has me very impressed with the exciting vision that Chief Kruger has for the PIB.

As Members of Parliament we also need to be part of the solution. The Penticton Indian Band has some very exciting projects that will create jobs and much needed revenue for the band. However as was pointed out by Chief Kruger, an abundance of land is of little benefit without infrastructure and services. Rather than focus resources after the fact, it is time to be more proactive and seek opportunities that are shovel ready. It is also important to recognize that one size fits all solutions as Ottawa is often accustomed to delivering need to be more flexible. In the months ahead I am looking forward to working with the PIB and Chief Kruger in an effort to create some positive economic opportunities on the band lands west of Penticton.

It should also be noted that in the Merritt area there is a new silver mine soon to get underway and that mine is anticipating roughly thirty percent of the workforce to be from local nearby First Nation communities. In total the mine will inject between \$ 12 - \$ 15 million annually into the local Merritt economy. As this is the final week the House of Commons is in session for the year I will have an opportunity to visit Merritt early next week. If you would like to schedule an appointment please do not hesitate to contact my office toll free at 1-800-665-8711