

## January 2014

### **January 6<sup>th</sup>**

On Monday of this week I read with dismay that the 80 year old Kamloops Daily News will cease publication within the next two months. I was immediately reminded of July in 2012 when many were equally saddened to learn of the final publication of the Merritt News. Community newspapers not only provide jobs, they also provide an important voice for citizens and often act as a forum on issues of importance to a region. Many of the comments and questions that I receive each week are often based directly on media reports, columns and interviews. In fact this week I can cite a recent example of the influence of local newspapers here in Okanagan-Coquihalla.

In a weekend newspaper article, one of our local Mayor's was quoted as stating that he believes "that it's the federal government's duty to bring back some of the federal tax dollars into this community for the purpose of infrastructure". Within hours of the column running I received both calls and emails from concerned taxpayers asking if Federal tax dollar transfers had been reduced or increased and by how much. Fortunately as a subscriber to the newspaper in question, I was able to find the article in question and provide the information back to the citizens who took the time to contact my office and share their concerns. For the record, here is that information.

Federal transfers to the Provinces in the upcoming fiscal year will reach close to \$65 billion. This is actually close to a \$3 billion increase over the past fiscal year and is 50% more money than was transferred to Provinces back in 2006. In other words Federal tax dollars transfers have actually increased significantly. In terms of infrastructure projects since 2006 over 43,000 projects have been funded across Canada with many in the communities of Okanagan-Coquihalla. Currently close to \$70 billion is budgeted over the next decade towards future infrastructure projects. In contrast the previous government invested \$10 billion over the entire 13 years they were in power.

Each summer I have travelled the riding on a listening tour; one of the items that has received ongoing support from many local Mayors is the enhancement of the Gas Tax fund for infrastructure. Initially conceived as a way for municipalities to create specified infrastructure projects, the initial feedback from communities is that it was too limited in terms of scope and investment to meet the needs of a specific community. Since taking office in 2006, our Government has doubled the Gas Tax fund, and also expanded the criteria to include roads, water infrastructure (a critical need in some communities) and public walking trails and corridors. The Brown Road upgrades in West Kelowna and Summerland traffic roundabouts with related sidewalks that include bus stops and lighting are good examples of these types of infrastructure. I was happy to vote in favour of making this 2 Billion a year fund permanent and indexed to inflation so that communities will know that they can count on stable and increased funding based on community needs, rather than endlessly chasing down grants du jour dictated from senior levels of Government.

The reality is that by all accounts transfers to the provinces and infrastructure spending has been significantly increased across the board. As a former city councillor I can recall waste-water, water improvement, and community centre projects among others that all received significant federal infrastructure dollars that were partnered with Provincial and local Government funds to ensure successful project completion.

The reason why I raise the issue of increased Federal transfers to provinces and significantly expanded infrastructure spending is due to the fact that as taxpayers it is your money and you deserve transparency from all levels of government on the spending of your tax dollars. Had a local newspaper not reported on this particular story from a local perspective many readers would have not been aware that transfers were in fact increasing and the absence of this information could be used as a means to attempt to raise taxes without a full accounting to local ratepayers. We should also be mindful that most newspapers are supported financially by advertisers in local small businesses. When a small business faces fiscal challenges often it is advertising and by extension newspapers that can feel the brunt of these economic realities. In some respects a community newspaper is somewhat of a barometer on the state of a community and the recent loss in Kamloops will be hard felt throughout the region and also in outlying communities such as Merritt and Logan Lake. Let us all remember to support our local media in 2014. If you have a comment, concern or question as always I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

### **January 13<sup>th</sup>**

Back in a mid November report I asked for input on the subject of pipelines. To my surprise, the amount of feedback I received was not as strong as I was hoping for. What was not surprising is the comments I did hear back were quite divided with some strongly opposed to all pipelines and others in support of some pipelines and not others while some strongly support all pipelines. The pipeline discussion is an important one as alternative petroleum transport solutions such as rail also carry risks that provoke important discussions on how Canada can best meet our future energy needs. One part of this discussion that has been largely absent is the question why Canada is currently in this situation.

One truth that we as Canadians must face is that per capita Canada is one of the greatest consumers of transportation fuels world-wide. This is not a surprise given that we are a large and vast country. Even many of those who come to protest pipelines in front of my office often drive long distances to do so. By the numbers Canada has close to one million kilometres of roads and we see over one million flights per year in the air. Ambulances, fire trucks and other first responder vehicles all use fuel. Many of our largest private sector employers depend upon the movement of goods, commodities and workers to survive. In fact one semi-truck will cross the border on average every two seconds moving roughly \$2 billion worth of goods on a daily basis. This all adds up to roughly 110 million litres of gasoline and an additional 50 million litres of diesel – used not every month nor every week but every day in our various forms of petroleum powered transportation.

When you combine Canadian gasoline and diesel fuel consumption in an average day that amounts to 160 million litres and at times this number increases to 200 million litres a day. Alternatives? Biofuel offers lower emissions but also lower energy density meaning more biofuel is required to cover the same distance as conventional gasoline. Natural Gas is another alternative that is currently strongly supported by the BC Provincial Government. Although there is a higher upfront cost and a lack of infrastructure it is cleaner burning and offers potential. Electricity including hybrids has been on the market in Canada for close to 15 years. In spite of a growing selection of hybrid models of the 1.6 million vehicles sold in 2012 less than 1% were hybrids as many consumers are reluctant to embrace

this platform. In many respects this leaves technology and vehicles that burn less gasoline or diesel but do so in a more emissions efficient manner. For example a 2005 or newer vehicle will produce 90% less smog than a vehicle from 1993 or older. These transportation trends point to a continued need for a significant daily supply of oil and gas to meet our energy needs.

When looking at these same transportation demands the question of supply and the need to move our supply around Canada safely becomes a key concern. Currently Canada has the third largest oil reserve worldwide- however this is only true if the oil sands are included. While some suggest the oil sands should be shut down it must be pointed out shutting down the oil sands would create a loss of 97% of Canada's oil reserve. This would seriously impact the security of our petroleum supply and more so in Western Canada as we consume more crude oil per day than other regions in Canada. Currently there are 18 major refineries across Canada producing slightly in excess of 300 million litres of refined petroleum products every day. These same refineries employ a total of 17,500 Canadians and contribute \$2.5 billion to our GDP annually. Due to the fact that Canada's existing pipeline infrastructure is either at capacity in some regions or nonexistent in others this results in some areas of Canada exporting petroleum while others import gasoline from outside of Canada. Ultimately Canada is a net exporter of oil.

Currently there are over 12,000 gas stations in Canada with higher volume locations pumping upwards of 10 million litres of fuel per year primarily for automotive use. This does not include oil used for propane/butane, asphalt, aviation fuel, motor oil, and other uses. Transportation as an industry currently makes up over 6% of Canada's overall economic output. To some this week's report may sound like a promotion of the Oil Sands. That is not the intent. I believe it is important to have an overview and an understanding on the fact that as Canadians the reality is the use of petroleum is a significant part of our everyday lives. Given our current consumption rates and the fact that 97% of our oil reserves are in the oil sands the importance of how we develop and safely transport our future energy needs are critically important questions that we as Canadians must face. This is an important discussion and one I continue to welcome your input on. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711

## **January 20<sup>th</sup>**

Recently one of our local newspapers in Okanagan-Coquihalla asked an online survey question to readers, the question was a simple one: "Do you support the CRTC's wireless code of conduct?". What got my attention was that nearly 70% of those who took part in the survey felt the code of conduct was either confusing or that they lacked enough information to form an accurate opinion. It is always concerning when such a large percentage of citizens indicate they lack sufficient information on a subject.

In this case information has been publicly available since the code of conduct was announced in June of last year however many may have tuned it out because while the announcement was made in June, the actual policy did not take effect until December 2nd of 2013. Another reason may be that the wireless code of conduct will be implemented differently dependent upon individual circumstances:

For any new wireless contract signed on December 2 of 2013 (or more recently) you are already covered under the new wireless code of conduct.

What if your contract is dated previous to December 2nd of 2013?

If your pre-existing contract is renewed, extended or has had the key terms amended after December 2, 2013 the wireless code of conduct will also apply to your contract.

What if your contract was signed prior to December 2nd of 2013 and you have no need to renew, extend or otherwise change the terms of your contract?

As of June 3rd of 2015 the wireless code of conduct will apply to all wireless contracts regardless of when they were signed.

What are the benefits of the wireless code of conduct?

Here is a brief summary of the conditions the Code of Conduct places on wireless providers to your benefit as customers: the ability to cancel your contract at no cost after a maximum of two years, the ability to cancel your contract and return your phone at no cost, within 15 days (and specific usage limits), if you are unhappy with the service, to be able to have your phone unlocked after 90 days, or immediately if you paid in full for your phone. Also included is the option to have your service suspended at no cost if your phone is lost or stolen, to receive a notification when you are roaming in a different country, disclosing what the rates are for voice services, text messages, and data usage, to limit your data overage charges to \$50 a month and your data roaming charges to \$100 a month and to charge no extras for a service described as "unlimited". You may also refuse a change to the key terms and conditions of your contract, including the services in your contract, the price for those services, and the duration of your contract. The above changes in some cases apply differently to pre-paid wireless services.

If you have further questions or comments on the wireless code of conduct please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Next week I will be back in Ottawa as the House of Common is back in session, with the exception of the odd brief break the House will sit from now until late June. As always if you have a question or a concern I am always happy to hear from you. I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll-free 1-800-665-8711.

## **January 27<sup>th</sup>**

This will be a very busy week given that the House of Commons is again sitting. On Monday I was scheduled for a Member's statement and was proud to recognize our local athletes who will be participating in the upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi. Competing in both the 2 man and 4 man Bobsled from Summerland is Justin Kripps. I would also like to congratulate Justin and his brakeman Bryan Barnett from Edmonton for winning their first world cup 2-man bobsled event in Germany this past weekend. Also headed for Sochi from Penticton is Matt Margetts, a talented freestyle skier competing in the exciting half pipe event. Finally Penticton's very own Duncan Keith will return to the blue line as a member of our National hockey team for the 2nd time. These young athletes are great role models for our future leaders and I know that many local citizens join me in wishing our athletes great success in Sochi.

Also occurring in the House of Commons on Monday is an emergency debate on the situation in the Ukraine. At this point the outcome of the debate is undetermined, however many Canadians are strongly concerned at growing violence that has resulted in the death of Ukraine citizens. The right of peaceful protest is an important one in any democratic society. As our Prime Minister recently pointed out in a speech to the Knesset "the ideals of freedom, democracy and the rule of law are not mere notions. They are the things that, over time and against all odds, have proven to be the only ground in which human rights, political stability, and economic prosperity, may flourish." I believe these thoughts should not be lost on the Ukraine, as citizens in that country face some very serious challenges.

There will also be a number of votes this week largely on private member's bills. Bill C-475, An Act to amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act and Bill C-513, Retirement Income Bill of Rights are two Bills coming forward while debate also continues on Government Bills C-2, The Respect for Communities Act and Bill C-12, The Drug-Free Prisons Act. The Opposition day motion and related votes will also be coming later in the week and may possibly involve recent Canada Post announcements regarding future door to door mail delivery. The Minister of Finance has also announced that the budget will occur earlier this year than recent years. The exact date for the budget has been set for February 11th, 2014 at 1 PM Pacific Standard Time. If you have a comment or concern on matters before the House of Commons or would like further information please do not hesitate to contact my office. During the House sessions I am generally available after dinner BC time. I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **February 2014**

### **February 3<sup>rd</sup>**

The last week has been a busy one on Parliament Hill with far too many topics to raise in the limited space of this week's report. For that reason I would like to focus on the topic that I believe is of greatest importance and that is veteran services and how that relates to the closure of eight Veterans Affairs offices.

Currently in Canada there is just under 600,000 veterans with roughly 130,000 of those veterans

having a file with Veterans Affairs. Historically there have been 68 Veterans Affairs offices in Canada including one in Okanagan-Coquihalla that is located in Penticton. The Penticton office is not one of the eight recently closed. These Veteran Affairs offices have certainly been beneficial for veterans in the 68 communities they are located in however this also leaves many regions of Canada without an office

to service as an access point for veterans services. It should also be noted that veteran affairs offices do not actually provide services directly to veterans– these offices serve as administrative points of contact so that veterans can ultimately access the services and benefits they do need.

Aside from appearing at a Veterans Affairs office in person, veterans do have other options to obtain services from Veterans Affairs. By far the most popular option is through the telephone as each year there are slightly over 700,000 calls made by veterans to Veterans affairs. In home service is also available to those veterans who may have mobility challenges however in home visits are not currently tracked so it is unclear how many veterans utilize this service. More recently Veterans Services have also been offered online; although some have questioned the ability of veterans to access services online currently 15,000 veterans have accessed services electronically.

In order to further increase the accessibility options for the many veterans who live in regions of Canada that are not among the 68 with a Veterans Affairs office, our Government is expanding Service Canada to also include the ability to access Veterans Affairs benefits and Services. This decision ensures that veteran services can be accessed at roughly 600 more Service Canada locations than was previously possible. In eight communities in Canada a situation arose where a Service Canada office was in extremely close proximity to a pre-existing Veterans Office. As an example in five of these community's Service Canada and Veterans affairs offices were located in the same building and in two other circumstances were within a kilometer of each others. In these situations of close proximity the decision was made to close the veterans affairs office and transfer some of the staff to the Service Canada office. Once these changes are in effect there will be 60 Veterans Affairs offices remaining combined with 600 Service Canada locations meaning veterans who desire to access service in person will have over 650 locations across Canada to do so.

From a funding perspective, veteran benefits have been increased overall by close to \$5 billion in new and additional funding- this has been invested to expand the eligibility for the permanent impairment allowance, setting monthly minimums for veteran's in rehabilitation, doubling the funds available to a family under the funeral and burial program are just a few examples of where the increased funding is being spent. This does not mean that challenges do not remain. We are also fortunate in Canada that the Royal Canadian Legion operates 1,461 branches Canada wide. The Legion is a valuable resource in representing the interests of veterans and works closely with all levels of Government to help ensure that the needs of our veterans are looked after. The Legion also provides support services to veterans that are made possible through donations to the poppy fund. I believe that Canadians are united in sharing the view that it is critically important veterans receive the benefits and services that they need. If you would like further information on specific veteran programs or services please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## February 10<sup>th</sup>

For this week's MP report I am going to add some inside perspective on a few recent events that have occurred in Ottawa over the past few weeks. As many of you may have heard, recently the Leader of the Federal Liberal Party made an announcement that effective immediately, all Liberal Senators would be booted from the Liberal caucus in an effort to try and ensure that the Liberal Senators would become more independent.

Many in the media reacted swiftly calling the idea "bold" while debate remained on what, if any, difference might occur. What is interesting about this idea is that it was actually the NDP who back in late October of 2013 introduced a motion in the House of Commons calling for "the introduction of immediate measures to end Senators' partisan activities, including participation in Caucus meetings" – what is more interesting is that when the NDP first introduced this idea the media did not characterize it as being "bold" – most in fact ignored the NDP motion. What is also notable is that at the time the leader of the Liberals actually voted against the motion, accusing the NDP of political haymaking over the Senate. Privately many NDP MP's I know are expressing disappointment and frustration that a NDP idea is treated differently in the media when it is adopted by another party.

The larger question is will expelled from caucus Senators become more independent? In the case of the Liberal Senators what was seldom reported was that within hours of being booted out of the Liberal caucus, the Liberal Senators met as a group and quickly re-elected the same Liberal Senate leader, the same Deputy Leader and most surprising even elected the same Senate party whip before declaring they were still a Liberal Senate caucus. The fact that a group of supposedly independent Senators would vote in a whip and continue to sit as a Liberal Senate caucus ensures that the extra pay and perks of a caucus (that are not available to truly independent Senators) would still flow and be paid for by taxpayers. In other words, nothing really changed as a result of this announcement. The inside joke in Ottawa is formerly Liberal senators have now become Senators who are Liberals. Ultimately the only real means of reforming that Senate remains before the Supreme Court, which is expected to issue formal legal guidelines on how the Senate can be reformed or abolished at some point within this year.

While on the topic of Senators many citizens have contacted me recently to express support for Private Members Bill C-518 from my Conservative colleague MP John Williamson. The Canadian Taxpayer's federation has also engaged in a campaign calling for public support of this bill. What does Bill C-518 propose? I have already spoken in favor of Bill C-518 moving forward in debate to review stage and my comments on this Bill from Hansard were as follows:

"We know Canadians expect that if parliamentarians are convicted of egregious crimes, they should face consequences. No different from everyday Canadians would expect to face consequences if convicted of an egregious crime, yet we also know that this is currently not the case. I would like to commend the member for New Brunswick Southwest for his work to attempt to remedy this. Currently, if a senator or member of Parliament retires or resigns prior to being convicted, or otherwise manoeuvres to avoid being expelled or disqualified from Parliament, that individual is still entitled to

his or her full pension, including the employer's share, which is funded by taxpayers. In other words, if one retires or resigns before being convicted of a crime, one still benefits from a generous pension plan. This is, in itself, an outrage to many taxpayers. " – MP Albas excerpt from Hansard

I will continue to provide updates on Bill C-518 as it progresses through debate as there has been a strong level of interest in this bill. Also occurring this week is the introduction of the budget that is happening on Tuesday, February 11th and will be the topic of next week's report. If you have any questions or concerns on Bills before Parliament please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **February 17<sup>th</sup>**

Each year the Federal Government, along with the Provinces & Territories bring down the annual budget for the upcoming fiscal period. That is always a much anticipated day and typically a very involved week. Budget analysis, reactions and politics are all part of this process as budgets will often reveal expected announcements as well as the unexpected and sometimes even surprises. This year's budget was no exception. From my own perspective there was one interesting surprise as my private members bill to allow the inter-provincial shipping of wine across Provincial borders directly to consumers (for personal consumption) will be expanded to also include beer and spirits. Given that Okanagan-Coquihalla is home to some excellent craft brewers along with a growing number of artisan distillers this is exciting news on the local level.

There are a number of other items in the budget that also stood out to me based on concerns I have heard from meeting with local citizens. One item is a \$305 million investment to extend high-speed broadband internet service. Here in Okanagan-Coquihalla we currently have rural families with no internet service whatsoever- for these families, many who are farmers and run small businesses, this will bring new opportunities currently enjoyed by most Canadian households but not in many rural areas. It is estimated roughly 280,000 homes currently without service will soon have broadband access with this funding.

Another important investment is \$222 million to implement new labour market agreements for persons with disabilities to help get skills training for available jobs. In addition is \$11.4 million in funding to Community Works that will help persons with other disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorders help participate in the workforce. In virtually every community throughout Okanagan-Coquihalla I have met disabled citizens who receive financial support from the Provincial Government and are eligible for an income earnings exemption that can further supplement household income. Unfortunately many citizens in this situation have expressed frustration that a lack of skills training creates a further barrier to securing employment. More skills training can help bridge the gap and create more opportunities for disabled citizens to access the workforce.

Budget 2014 also creates significant new investments in programs to help older workers stay in the workforce as well as programs to create internships in high demand occupations including positions in small and medium-sized businesses to help youth job creation. This is especially helpful for youth as often it is the first job that can be the most difficult to land.

Budget 2014 also creates a new tax credit for Search & Rescue volunteers. Last fall I joined with a group of Merritt citizens in a search & rescue effort looking for a missing father. The expertise and efforts of search & rescue volunteers makes a huge difference in many parts of Okanagan-Coquihalla in saving lives and at times extracting deceased family members to help bring closure when unfortunate accidents occur. A special thank you to all of our search & rescue volunteers.



Although these are just a few items in Budget 2014 that I have referenced in this week's MP report there are over fifty more that given enough space I would have also included details about. On a Provincial level I can also pass on that transfers from the Federal Government to British Columbia will also increase in Budget 2014. Total major transfers to BC will be just under \$6 billion in total. Overall this is close to a 60% increase of Provincial transfers compared to 2005-2006 under the previous Federal Government. If you would like more information on Budget 2014 please do not hesitate to contact me at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **March 2014**

### **March 4<sup>th</sup>**

It is another very busy week in Ottawa with a large amount of different but important events that will be challenging to summarize all in this week's report. First I would like to thank the many citizens and groups who took the time to comment on last week's report regarding invasive species- in particular freshwater mussels. It is encouraging that many citizens are supportive of the need to be proactive against invasive species and I will provide further updates in this area as they become available. Two other subjects that I have heard a large amount of feedback from citizens on in Okanagan-Coquihalla this week include opposition to the recent reclassification of certain long guns and support for Elizabeth May's Private Members Bill C-442 "National Lyme Disease Strategy Act".

The decision to re-classify certain firearms is currently under review by Minister Blaney however the Minister has announced an amnesty program to ensure that existing individuals "in possession of these firearms can continue to possess their property without threat of criminal charges". With respect to Bill C-442 currently this Bill has been introduced at first reading in the House of Commons and is now placed on the Order of Preference at number 18. I will also provide further information on the progress of this Private Member's Bill as it comes forward for second reading debate in the House of Commons.

Recently in the House, Government Bill C-26 was also introduced, The "Tougher Penalties for Child Predators Act". This Bill proposes a number of changes to those convicted of serious child offences. Some of these changes include a requirement that those convicted of child sexual offences against multiple children to serve sentences consecutively- one after another rather than at the same time concurrently; along with an increase for maximum and minimum prison sentences for certain child sexual offences. Penalties will also be increased for violations of supervision orders and any crime committed while on house arrest or parole will be considered an aggravating factor at sentencing. In addition, registered sex offenders will also be required to disclose more information when travelling abroad and more availability for spousal testimony in child pornography cases will be made available. Thus far the comments I have heard from citizens on Bill C-26 have been supportive.

Also occurring this week is a motion, the full text is as follows:

"That the House recognize the importance of transparency and accountability in the expenditure of taxpayers' money and also recognize that the majority of parties have already begun disclosing the

travel and hospitality expenses of their Members; and therefore call on the Board of Internal Economy to instruct the non-partisan professional administrative staff of the House of Commons to begin posting all travel expenses incurred under the travel point system as well as hospitality expenses of Members to the Parliament of Canada website in a manner similar to the guidelines used by the government for proactive disclosure of ministerial expenses.”

As I am one of the MP's who has already been voluntarily posting these expenses, I naturally will be supporting the motion to ensure this information is provided to taxpayers as a regular part of internal economy administration reporting. If you have comments or questions on any matter before the House of Commons do not hesitate to contact me at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

### **March 11<sup>th</sup>**

This week our Government announced that negotiations between Canada and South Korea on a free trade agreement have successfully concluded. As is often the case when trade deals are announced there are reactions from a variety of different groups, businesses, individuals, political interests and organizations that either oppose or support the agreement in question. Often these comments are based on speculation no differently than some in the BC Wine industry once feared that BC could not compete when the United States free trade agreement were concluded. Today we now know that BC wines can compete with the best in the world and there are many other local industries that depend upon open access to the United States marketplace.

One of the questions I am hearing from some citizens is why South Korea? In response to this question looking at the Canada-South Korea free trade agreement from a British Columbia perspective is useful to understand the economic importance of this announcement. Many are unaware that South Korea is now B.C.'s fourth largest trading partner – as an example between 2010-2012 the value of B.C. exports to South Korea was in the range of \$2 billion in value. This success in trade occurred in spite of the fact that South Korea has tariffs on imported BC goods often between 8% and up to 15%. By comparison most goods from South Korea imported into Canada have tariffs in the 4-6% range, on average South Korea's tariffs on Canadians goods are three times higher over Canada's tariffs on South Korean imports. This trade imbalance will no longer exist as over 98% of tariffs will be eliminated with this free trade agreement. This in turn provides open access for Canadian business to access a market of 50 million people in a 1.1 trillion dollar South Korean economy.

Local reaction in Okanagan-Coquihalla so far has been positive. Premium BC wines & icewine that are popular in Asia currently face a 15% import tariff in South Korea and thus will be eliminated under the free trade agreement. Likewise BC Cherry & Blueberry producers often faced tariffs as high 30% even 45%; the removal of these restrictive cost increases will help these industries expand on the \$ 210 million exported to South Korea in 2012. I have already heard from one Okanagan-Coquihalla based value added wood producer who is encouraged that his company's timber products will soon no longer be subject to an import tariff of 10% or higher. This is encouraging as BC value added wood exports to South Korea exceeded \$300 million between 2010-2012. It is also worth pointing out that in many cases import tariffs can be subject to change depending upon tariff classification. I have heard from farmers who have experienced challenge and even hardship when facing significant

increases in tariffs as a result of a change in import classification. These changes for a small producer can be financially devastating more so with a product that has a short shelf-life. Free-trade agreements with countries like South Korea provide certainty for BC producers and exporters and that helps to grow and increase business in new markets.

One other exciting aspect of the free trade agreement with South Korea is that it not only applies to goods; it also applies to services. BC, much like other parts of Canada, has become a leader in many industries such as mining, environmental services, oil and gas, clean energy and transportation are a few that many will be familiar with. Under this agreement these services can now be provided into South Korea by Canadian companies. In addition Canadian independent professionals (examples such as architects, engineers, management consultants and veterinarians) may enter South Korea with a pre-arranged contract. In order to explore new opportunities South Korea is creating new temporary-entry provisions for business visitors, investors, intra company service professionals and others to support new and existing business activities. Although this agreement is Canada's first free trade agreement within the Asia-Pacific region, early forecasts estimate the potential to increase Canadian exports by 32% for a \$1.7 billion increase in Canadian economic activity. The importance of opening up new markets for our local employers is a critical part to maintaining well paying jobs that support families and our communities. If you have comments or questions on this free trade agreement or any issue before the House of Commons please contact me at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

### **March 17<sup>th</sup>**

This is the second week of a two week break before the House of Commons resumes sitting on Monday, March 24<sup>th</sup>. Over the past many days I have travelled throughout Okanagan-Coquihalla and met with many citizens, groups and local government leaders. Last week there was a strong level of enthusiasm for the recently announced Canada-South Korea free trade agreement. Given that British Columbia, with its strategic gateway location, strong business and cultural ties with the Asia-Pacific region, is considered to be first of the Canadian Provinces to benefit from this agreement. At a very recent round table in Kelowna there was positive reaction from exporters who in the past have faced tariffs anywhere from ten to as high as forty percent. The elimination of these tariffs and certainty for access to this market will create some real opportunities for Okanagan producers and fruit growers.

Also this week I have also come to better appreciate and understand the critical value of trade to Okanagan-Coquihalla for a different set of reasons, with the current trucking dispute at Port Metro Vancouver. In addition to affected businesses throughout Okanagan-Coquihalla, I have heard from concerned Mayors, councillors, regional directors and MLA's on the very real possibility of large scale employers considering temporary closure as a result of not being able to import/ export much needed goods either to or from the Port. The movement of goods in many cases is critical to the cash flow of small business operators who also must make payroll, pay taxes and other expenses related to running a business. The sheer volume and scope of different business operations that rely on trade are large scale and affects many sectors of our local economy that in turn can create ripple effects into other areas.

One other issue that I continue to hear feedback from citizens on a Private Member's Bill, known as Bill C-442, "An Act Respecting a National Lyme Disease Strategy". For many citizens in Okanagan-

Coquihalla Lyme disease is a very real concern and as a result I can confirm that I will be supporting this Bill to move forward to committee review stage for further study. In the event the Bill passes, I will also follow the review carefully and provide further updates as they become available.

While this will be another busy week of meetings, I would like to sincerely thank the many citizens who do take the time to offer questions, comments and also criticism. I believe it is important for citizens to always hold your elected officials from all levels of government to account. If there is a decision or policy you do not agree with, please take the time to contact your elected representatives and ask for the reasons why a decision was made. Part of how we achieve better government decisions is from hearing from all sides and I certainly welcome your views in this regard. I can be reached at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **April 2014**

### **April 1<sup>st</sup>**

I have written in previous reports and spoken on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in the House of Commons. The feedback from constituents for a number of years has been consistent in supporting tighter regulations that ensure Canadians are provided the first opportunity for employment and that those who become temporary foreign workers are not abused or taken advantage of. Recent regulatory changes have also supported these principles and up until recently, most citizens were strongly in support of enhanced regulation in this area.

Unfortunately a situation has arisen in the community of Merritt where changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and compliance issues could result in the loss of a community dance instructor from South Africa. For privacy reasons there is considerable information that I cannot share that has led to these challenges however it is also apparent that in my view, this process is currently failing the community of Merritt. I have long maintained that there must be a balance between regulatory oversight and acknowledging what the real circumstances are. To date in this instance, regulatory oversight appears to be usurping common sense and regrettably the temporary foreign worker program does not provide the same avenues for reconsideration that are available under other immigration programs. In summary, the Merritt situation demonstrates that when a community does strongly support the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the program has shown it lacks the ability to recognize that. This is something we need to change. Much of my work in Ottawa over the past weeks and in particular this week has been to attempt to find an avenue to rectify this situation within the framework of Government that must treat compliance issues with the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in a fair and equitable way. This is an issue that I will continue to actively work on.

On the subject of employment related matters, as of April 1st, the plastic Social Insurance Cards (SIN cards) we are all familiar with will no longer be issued by the Government of Canada. Instead of a plastic SIN card, applicants will receive a paper letter that contains your SIN number. There is no fee to apply for this new paper issued SIN number. One frequently asked question by those keen to join the workforce, is what age can a young person apply to receive a SIN number? The answer is anyone who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident 12 years of age or

older can apply for a SIN number.

One final question I have received this week is in regards to recent claims that the Federal Government is cutting \$36 billion from Health Care. These claims are misleading and false. In reality the Federal Government budgeted health transfers to Canadian Provinces and Territories will increase annually. To be clear, each year the Provincial Governments and Territories will receive more funds from the Federal Government than the previous year. Currently health transfers from the Federal Government are at a record level of \$32 billion per year. By the end of the decade health transfers will surpass \$40 billion. What will be changing in 2017 is how the funding formula is calculated for health transfers. After 2017 the transfer formula will be based on a three-year moving average of nominal Gross Domestic Product, with a guaranteed minimum increase to health transfer funding of at least 3 per cent per year. In other words each a year a Province will continue to receive more funds than the previous year thus there is a guaranteed annual increase to the Provinces and territories and not a cut in funding as was done by previous federal Governments.

If you have a comment, question or concern on any matter before the House of Commons please do not hesitate to contact me at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

#### **April 7<sup>th</sup>**

The temporary foreign worker program has again made major headlines across British Columbia. This week complaints centered on a number of fast food restaurants in Victoria. The complaint was that temporary foreign workers were being offered employment over Canadian workers who were also available for work. If these allegations are established as being accurate, an offending employer could face significant fines and even imprisonment. At the present time these allegations are being actively investigated by the same integrity division that has been involved in the situation I referenced in last week's report that involves a resident of South Africa teaching dance in the community of Merritt under the temporary foreign worker program.

Over the past seven days since last week's report significant progress has been made in the hopes that in the future dance classes for children in Merritt will continue to be offered. Some of the questions I most frequently receive from concerned citizens on this issue is the lack of an obvious common sense solution and slow timeframe of the compliance process. As I am discovering first hand there are a number of variables in these situations that are all deserving of consideration. Obviously, no Canadian desires to see temporary foreign workers exploited while in Canada- to help guard against exploitation complaints can be reported through email [integrity@servicecanada.gc.ca](mailto:integrity@servicecanada.gc.ca) or by phone at [1 800 367-5693](tel:1-800-367-5693). Although a complainant may decide to publicly identify themselves, the Government handles all complaints of this nature as strictly confidential.

The compliance process is in many ways one and the same as an investigative process and depends upon actual evidence being presented to ensure employers and workers in Canada under the temporary foreign worker program are honouring the commitments agreed to under the initial agreement to participate in the program. There may be a need for verification that a worker has been fully compensated and legitimately paid and not syphoned off by third parties or elaborate kickback

schemes to circumvent the law. It also should be pointed out that investigators with the Integrity Division acquire expertise in methods that are frequently used by some in an attempt to exploit the temporary foreign worker program and resulting best practices for compliance are used to help resolve cases of non compliance. All of this unfortunately takes time.

My intent of this week`s report is not to defend how the Integrity Division of the Temporary Foreign worker program has worked in Merritt with the Love to Dance Academy but rather to provide some context on some of the reasons why compliance concerns can be quite extensive to satisfy. Fortunately progress continues to be made in Merritt and I am hopeful that lessons learned here can offer future efficiencies in other areas with similar circumstances.

A few other points for this week. In last week`s report I mentioned that youth who are twelve years of age or older may apply for their own SIN number. I should have also provided more detail on this point: for children under twelve years of age, parents or other legal guardians can apply for a child`s SIN number- for example, if someone wished to set up a Registered Education Savings Plan. Twelve years of age is when a youth can apply for a SIN card on their own. Another point comes courtesy of the Okanagan Basin Water Board – to remind boaters that a vessel infected with invasive freshwater mussel larvae may live inside moist areas of a vessel for extended periods of time –potentially for as long as a month thus pointing to the need for a thorough inspection process. If you have a comment, question or concern on any matter before the House of Commons I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

#### **April 9<sup>th</sup>**

Invasive species are sadly not new to Okanagan-Coquihalla. Cattle Ranchers have battled with the loss of valuable grazing lands on account of invasive weeds as much as fruit growers and farmers know the frustration of crop loss as a result of the European Starling.

Swimmers and boaters are familiar with Eurasian milfoil not unlike local fisherman who are well aware of the damaged caused by the introduction of Mysis shrimp into the Okanagan Lake system. All of these invasive species have caused ecological harm and in some cases financial loss both directly and indirectly as different levels of government have funded strategies to control, reduce or eliminate these unwelcome invasive intrusions into our local ecosystem.

From my perspective being proactive and vigilant to guard against future threats of invasive species is important. Recently the Okanagan Basin Water Board has undertaken a campaign to warn citizens and senior levels of government on the important need to take action against another invasive species: freshwater mussels. First I would like to commend the Okanagan Basin Water Board for the work they have done in bringing this matter forward. From the limited research I have undertaken there is indeed a potential serious threat to many of our valued freshwater lakes in Okanagan-Coquihalla and elsewhere.

Aside from the potential environmental harm, of particular concern is the fact that many citizens in our region depend upon safe, reliable drinking water that is drawn from the Okanagan Lake water system. Freshwater mussels are well known to clog intake pipes that in turn can cause considerable damage to pumps and filtration systems. Currently many of our water purveyors are already struggling to meet increased Interior Health water regulation standards and the added impact of damage to

water infrastructure could be in the range of tens of millions of dollars along with the potential inconvenience of suspension of water service while repairs are undertaken. In short, an unacceptable situation.

Ultimately invasive mussels are most likely to be spread by a contaminated boat or trailer from another region most likely originating either from outside of Canada or from eastern Canada. Fortunately boats transported from eastern Canada will most likely be out of the water for five days (given the distance) that is considered sufficient time that a mussel cannot survive out of water. Thus the largest threat in our region would be from boats south of the boarder where there are currently freshwater lakes contaminated with invasive mussels. It is critically important to intercept a contaminated boat and trailer on land before it enters a freshwater lake, thus enhanced enforcement at Canadian border crossings is an obvious measure to prevent the spread of freshwater mussels. As a secondary consideration, the integrated roadside enforcement unit that currently patrol BC roads may stop a boat and trailer for safety defects could potentially have an expanded role to inspect for invasive mussel growth. Additionally the same may apply to local Conservation officers who frequently patrol lakes and boat launches looking for fishing violations could be another consideration.

Obviously these potential solutions involve joint Federal and Provincial Government collaboration and likewise local government could work with marinas, yacht clubs and other boat launching areas with an education campaign. At the moment regulation around invasive species such as freshwater mussels is already under review and I plan on meeting with several Ministers in Ottawa to expedite greater vigilance at border crossings– more so now as the 2014 boating season has yet to begin. The intent of this report is to provide an update on what I believe is an important issue and the efforts underway to help mitigate them. As always I welcome your comments on this or any concern; my email address is [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or alternately I can be reached via phone at 1 (800) 665-8711.

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**Additional update:** Another point comes courtesy of the Okanagan Basin Water Board – to remind boaters that a vessel infected with invasive freshwater mussel larvae may live inside moist areas of a vessel for extended periods of time –potentially for as long as a month thus pointing to the need for a thorough inspection process.

#### **April 15<sup>th</sup>**

Parliament Hill was rocked last week with the devastating news of the unexpected loss of our colleague, the Hon. Jim Flaherty. Media coverage on events in Ottawa tends to be focused on those moments that are most controversial or in many cases out of the norm. Unfortunately as the “out of the norm” scenes are most frequently shown many believe there is a strong dislike between Members of Parliament on different sides of the House. In reality for many MPs, more so those in the west with greater travel distances, we collectively spend as much time if not more time with our colleagues than in some cases we spend with our families. In many ways the House of Commons, while adversarial and intense, is still like a second family for many of us. To lose someone so unexpectedly is shocking and more so when it is an individual who behind the scenes always took a great deal of time and interest in the well being of others. I will always recall taking an issue forward from a constituent in Summerland to Minister Flaherty who not only took the time to hear the suggestion, within six months took action. Service to others with a smile was a hallmark of Minister Flaherty’s career and I

would like to thank the many citizens who have taken the time to share a kind word during this difficult time. For those who have expressed an interest, there will be a book of condolences for Minister Flaherty's family at both my Penticton and West Kelowna offices from now until the 25th of April.

Recently you may have heard that the Canada Revenue Agency website was potentially compromised by a computer virus known as the "Heartbleed Bug". It has been suggested that it is possible a limited amount of personal information, more specifically SIN numbers, may have been wrongfully accessed. ESDC, Service Canada and CRA staff is currently taking actions to identify those individuals who may have had personal information breached as a result of this virus. All individuals who may be impacted by this "Heartbleed virus" will receive notification from the Canada Revenue Agency that will provide a special contact number and additional information on this matter. Although it has been suggested the breach affected roughly 900 individuals if you or anyone you know believes they may have been impacted by this event and have not been contacted by CRA please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Currently there are a number of issues that I am hearing about. The subject of temporary foreign workers remains an issue of concern for many citizens although it should be pointed out while most are very concerned over misuse of the program there are also those who are strongly supportive of it, as was recently the case in Merritt. I have also have had a few citizens drop in and share their concerns on Canada Post. Another area of more recent concern is a campaign from poultry farmers who have illustrated the importance of timely grain feed shipment to local farms. Recently I have also been contacted by citizens both for and against changes to the Elections Act as proposed in the Fair Elections Act, otherwise known as Bill C-23. Currently this act is being reviewed both in the House of Commons and the Senate where it has been suggested that amendments will be proposed. It is my personal view that Bill C-23 will likely see some revisions before potentially moving onto third reading debate. Once a more finalized version of the Bill has been put forward I will speak further on this particular subject as I believe it is of importance. On the subject of amendments, recently the Reform Act of 2013 from my colleague Michael Chong has also been amended into a new Bill (now the recently tabled Reform Act of 2014) that I will be asking for more input on in future report.

As the House of Commons is currently on the Easter break I am available for the next ten days to meet with you to discuss areas of concern and to answer questions that you may have. Please contact me at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or via phone at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **April 22<sup>nd</sup>**

One of many things I have learned in my time as a Member of Parliament is that when it comes to serious acts of senseless violence and the traumatic loss of loved ones is that while media attention is often very intense when these acts occur, they are more often than not short lived. Family and friends left behind from these brutal acts of violence never forget and even decades later are still impacted in ways that forever change their lives. In 1982 a disturbing act of violence took the lives of a loving family of six while on a camping trip in Wells Gray provincial Park. The shock of losing a local family including two young girls devastating many in the community of Westbank. Friends, co-workers and classmates to this very day are still reminded of this tragedy as every two years they are forced to re-live their loss and this horrific event.



Why do I say they are forced? The individual responsible for taking the lives of this family: David Shearing (who has since changed his name to David Ennis), is due for yet another legislated review that could potentially lead to being paroled. For the family and friends left behind, this means another trip they must finance to travel a significant distance in order to appear at the review.

I believe we should all take a moment to reflect on this situation. September is a time of year when children and families are getting ready for a new school year. It should not be a time when families and friends are forced to travel a significant distance at great expense solely to relive a life-altering tragedy and face the individual who forever destroyed their families and friendships. The fact that the victims are forced to continually make this journey and relive this horror every few years is in my view unthinkable. It seldom makes the news these days but when I hear from the victims, friends and classmates this is a situation that continues to cause great pain and suffering for all of them. Many live in fear to this day in the event that parole is ever granted. As I shared in the House of Commons in June of last year, it should not have to be this way. No family should be forced to endure reliving such a horrific tragedy over and over at parole hearings. Many citizens I have heard from in Westbank/West Kelowna agree and currently a petition and other advocacy campaigns are underway to help gain support to take action in this situation.

I support the citizens of Westbank in these efforts and that is why I am also supporting Private Members Bill C-587 from Okanagan-Shuswap MP Colin Mayes. Bill C-587 (formerly Bill C-478 from Selkirk-Interlake MP James Bezan) "Respecting Families of Murdered and Brutalized Persons Act". Bill C-587 is a very specific bill that is intended to impact only those individuals convicted of very serious criminal acts involving abduction, sexual assault and ultimately murder. Bill C-587 does not propose to alter the period of time a criminal convicted of these combined acts would spend in jail. What Bill C-587 does propose is to offer a judge the added discretionary ability of increasing the period of parole ineligibility from the current 25 year maximum up to a maximum of 40 years. The intent of this bill is solely to spare family's and victims the trauma of having to appear at a parole hearing every two years as is currently the case for those in West Kelowna appearing at the Alberta located hearing for David Ennis. This Bill, if passed, would have also been of benefit to families who lost loved ones from other convicted murderers such as Clifford Olson (now deceased) Paul Bernardo, David James Dobson and others. This Bill is currently awaiting second reading debate. If you would like further information on this or any bill before the House of Commons please contact me via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **April 29<sup>th</sup>**

If you have been following the Fair Elections Act debate in Ottawa you may have heard alarmist language applied from opposition and media that this bill is an unprecedented attack on democracy. This of course raises the obvious question is the Fair Elections Act an unprecedented assault on our democratic process? The answer is of course open to debate, much as it should be in any healthy democratic environment. However there is another developing aspect emerging to this discussion that concerns me greatly. Although it is fair to say critics have targeted a number of items to this bill (prior to Government responding with some 45 proposed amendments) the single greatest concern has focussed on vouching- a concern that is also addressed by a recent an amendment. Vouching for those who are unfamiliar in essence allows someone to

declare their identity without producing acceptable identification, in this case to vote in a Federal election.

Locally of course requiring identification to vote is not unusual given that we use identification to determine voting eligibility between municipal boundaries and that of regional districts and by extension voting on consent for referendums on borrowing by-laws and other large scale projects and referendums. In many cases identification and proof of residency are of course used to verify those eligible to vote are the same citizens who will be required to pay on the initiative in question. We also require identification as we recognize that at times there may be ratepayers with strong opinions on particular issues and it is important that one citizen cannot vote more than once. These are the principles of fairness that we use in local elections to ensure the integrity of our democratic voting process. Yet at the Federal level- it is currently possible to vouch for identity without showing approved identification, through a process known as vouching. Much debate has occurred on the reasonableness or lack of reasonableness on requiring identification to vote federally, as we typically do municipally with local government. Some have even suggested this is a constitutional issue, pointing out that the Charter guarantees "Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein."

It deserves mention that charter rights apply to citizens of Canada- how are our rights and privileges as Canadians verified without proof of identification that confirms we are indeed Canadian citizens? And by extension would we support vouching at our border crossings that individuals entering Canada can claim to be Canadians without showing identification as proof? The answer to this question is also up for debate as there are some who do support vouching and feel it is unreasonable to require identification. My intent in this week's report is not actually to enter into the debate on how reasonable it is (or is not) to require identification to vote. I submit that every Canadian citizen has views on how reasonable it is (or is not) to require identification as part of our democratic process and I believe that is a healthy discussion in a democratically diverse country such as Canada.

What troubles me in the vouching debate as it pertains to the Fair Election Act is that the opinions of everyday Canadians seem to fall to the wayside. If you follow Ottawa media reports it is commonly suggested that only "experts" and not everyday citizens are capable of forming an opinion on the reasonableness of requiring ID to vote. We should always be mindful that we do not live in a technocratic society ruled by bureaucracy; we are an inclusive democratic society that draws in the views of all Canadians including experts and at time other stakeholders and specific interest groups. In this case, what the experts seldom point out is that currently 85% of our Canadian voting population currently has a drivers licence and this percentage rises considerably higher when you include the other 39 types of ID Elections Canada accepts in order to vote. In reality we know voter turnout is far less than 85% of registered voters-requiring identification is not the reason for declining voter turnout. In fact many of those currently employed by taxpayers to increase voter turnout are the very same experts in Ottawa arguing for the status quo to prevail. Collectively we must all accept responsibility for declining voter participation and in particular those of us who are elected officials should be the first to shoulder the blame.

What is causing decreased voter turnout? I submit part of the decline is evident in the debate on the

Fair Elections Act- I believe every Canadian is entitled to have an opinion on the reasonableness (or lack of) to requirement ID to vote. The question of if it is reasonable requiring ID to vote is a matter of personal opinion; it is not a matter of "expert" conclusion as some in Ottawa are suggesting. That so many "experts" (including some who have never worked or volunteered in an election) along with a willing media that in many cases does not recognize the dissenting views from everyday citizens is in my view troubling. I mention this as the feedback I have heard from many citizens is at odds with the tone in Ottawa. I am not suggesting that all citizens support the Fair Elections Act, many have taken the time to express concerns, some even outright opposition however many have also made it clear they strongly support the act including the reasonableness to show identification to vote no differently that exists in other elections at different levels of government. I continue to welcome your comments and questions on the Fair Elections Act or any bill before Parliament.

## May 2014

### **May 6<sup>th</sup>**

This week will be a slightly shortened one in Ottawa as the House will be adjourned on Friday for Members of Parliament to attend National Day of Honour ceremonies to mark the end of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. For many Canadians, including families and friends here in Okanagan-Coquihalla, Canada's service in Afghanistan was a life changing experience. There are times when words cannot properly reflect the magnitude of loss for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice serving in our armed forces. It is also important that we recognize the service of our non-military personnel who also volunteered to accept positions in Afghanistan at great personal risk to themselves. These brave Canadians had a commitment and a desire to help build a better country that protected the values of those more vulnerable citizens from tyranny and oppression. While there will always be debate on the success of these efforts, let us never question the sacrifice or the commitment of the many brave Canadians who served with dignity and respect.

Prior to Friday there will be a number of private members bills coming up in debate. Some of these bills include Bill C-560 An Act to amend the Divorce Act (equal parenting) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, Bill C-570—An Act to amend the Criminal Code (mandatory minimum sentences for rape) and Bill C-539— Promotion of Local Foods Act. Also debated will be the opposition day motion on temporary foreign workers along with votes on Bills C-479 An Act to Bring Fairness for the Victims of Violence, Bill C-208 An Act to amend the Supreme Court Act, Bill C-483 An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (escorted temporary absence) and Bill C-567- An Act to amend the Access to Information Act (transparency and duty to document).

On the topic of Private Members Bill C-587 from Okanagan-Shuswap MP Colin Mayes. Bill C-587 (formerly Bill C-478 from Selkirk-Interlake MP James Bezan) "Respecting Families of Murdered and Brutalized Persons Act" that I referenced in my April 22, 2014 MP report, will come before the House of Commons on May 30, 2014.

I would like to pass on special thanks to many in Okanagan-Coquihalla for expressing strong support for this particular bill that will help prevent families of very serious crime from being re-victimized on an ongoing basis through the parole process. The Penticton Herald ran a poll on this bill and while not scientific, 86% of those who responded expressed support for Bill C-587. Locally I have also had a number of citizens come in to sign the petition that opposes parole for Mr. David Ennis (formerly known as David Shearing), the man responsible for taking the lives of the Johnson-Bentley family in August of 1982. This level of support is very helpful as it helps me to take a strong message to Ottawa: that the family and loved ones who are left behind should not be forced to relive these tragedies. The petition will continue to be available at both my Westbank and Penticton offices through the month of May and early June.

I would also like to express regret on the recently announced resignation of Chief Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations. Chief Atleo is a British Columbia based aboriginal leader who worked tirelessly to further aboriginal education and other challenges at the national level. This is an incredibly demanding and difficult job and I am not alone in expressing appreciation for Chief Atleo's efforts in this regard.

If you have a comment, question or concern on any matter before the House of Commons I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or by phone at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

### **May 13<sup>th</sup>**

Last week a group of concerned local citizens dropped a petition to my Penticton office on "The Right to Save Seeds" – this petition, signed by 37 residents, is the second on this topic that I have received. On a related note, I was also asked recently how petitions work in the House of Commons and what happens to them once they have been tabled. In order to be deemed "valid" in the House of Commons a petition must be verified by the Clerk of Petitions – a process that has been in operation since roughly 1910 with some further modification in 1986. As a Member of Parliament, the petition I received this week will be forwarded to the Clerk for verification. Guidelines for petitions can be found online however it is important that petitions be addressed to the House of Commons and typically contain a statement identifying the petitioners and the issue in question that is the focus of the petition.

Once a petition has been verified by the Clerk it is returned to the Member of Parliament in question to be presented to the House of Commons. Interestingly enough, a Member of Parliament is not required to present a verified petition and may decline to do so. In addition there is no established time frame that is defined on when a petition may be presented following verification and likewise once a petition has been verified it can be presented by any Member of Parliament regardless if it was that Member or another MP who first submitted the petition for verification. Generally while I have observed it is not uncommon for different MP's to present petitions that may have been certified by a different MP typically petitions are presented in a timely manner and most MP's, (myself included) consider it a duty to present petitions on behalf of citizens in our riding.

Verified petitions can be submitted during routine proceedings (when the House is in session) and while brief comments of a factual nature are allowed to present the petition any supplementary comments or debate are not allowed and would be deemed out of order. Petitions can also be

presented to the House by being filed with the Clerk directly– this often occurs on days when there are multiple members with petitions that exceed the fifteen minute time frame that is set aside for petitions during routine proceedings. What happens once petitions are filed? Many people believe that once a petition has been presented to the House of Commons that the process is now complete. In reality, once a petition has been presented in the House, the Clerk will forward the petition onto the Privy Council Office, who in turn will forward the petition to the relevant Government Ministry that has 45 calendar days to respond. Government responses to petitions are also generally tabled in the House of Commons during routine proceedings and the MP who presented the petition in the House will also typically receive a copy of the response.

It should also be noted that there are no Parliamentary sanctions in the event the Government fails to respond within the 45 days– a point that was raised extensively back in 1993, however it is widely recognized that the established deadlines should be respected.

I view petitions as an important part of our democratic process. Citizens should be free to petition a request or oppose a course of action by Government and receive a response in a timely manner. The principle of accountability and being heard is one that all elected officials should always be mindful of and that is why I welcome petitions and make every effort to have them verified and presented into the House of Commons in a timely manner. If you would like more information on petitions or any matter before the House of Commons please do not hesitate to contact me at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or via telephone at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **May 20<sup>th</sup>**

Last week was an unusually partisan one in the House of Commons even by Ottawa standards. At Issue was the Standing Committee on Procedure & House Affairs (often referred to as PROC) where the leader of the official opposition appeared as a witness to answer questions on the use of taxpayers' funds in what some have described as partisan political satellite "outreach" offices. The testimony and exchanges were testy, aggressive and revealing. Ultimately this issue also exposed what can be a fine line between activities that are deemed to be partisan as opposed to non partisan. This issue also illustrated there is a general difference of opinion and in some cases a lack of understanding, on what the role of a Member of Parliament's office should be.

From my perspective, a Member of Parliament's office is ultimately a location to host meetings, meet with constituents and assist citizens on issues and concerns of importance that are raised relating to the Federal Government. Often providing information or other assistance to access Government services or resolving conflicts are also common items that arise. Collectively a MP office budget is funded from the House of Commons following regulations established by the all party Board of Internal Economy and then administered through non partisan public officials. Although there are many safeguards and oversights to protect the interests of taxpayers there are still aspects of a MP's office that operate on a discretionary basis set by the Member, who we should recognize is ultimately responsible. Offices may have different operating structures based on how an individual MP allocates resources provided from what is known as the Member's Office Budget, often called the MOB internally.

Each fiscal year a set amount of funds is advanced to a Member of Parliament that covers all

operational costs. At the end of a fiscal year (March 31st), if the full amount of funds allocated are not used by the Member of Parliament, 95% of the balance will be returned to the House of Commons and 5% can be carried over towards the next year's budget. Conversely, if a Member of Parliament exceeds that office budget allotment, then the Member is personally responsible for the amount over the fixed budget. Once a MP retires, resigns, or is defeated in an election, all funds remaining are returned to the House of Commons. It should also be pointed out that there are reasonably firm guidelines in spending with requirements for receipts that ultimately are checked over by financial administration staff in Ottawa. Over time many unique rules have also been implemented typically in response to questionable spending or other practices that occurred because a loophole was identified or a specific limitation was not in place outlining a prohibited action. For example, it is now in the Members' Office rulebook that a short term "travel companion" cannot be hired. While I can only speculate how this rule came into being, it is the rule that for any employee to be eligible for a travel expense, said employee must now be on staff for a minimum of 90 days.

One of the most important prevailing guidelines is that outside of Ottawa, office spending is for constituency related work on behalf of constituents and should not be used in any way for partisan political activities. In other words, activities that are intended to promote political interests should be funded by political parties and not from taxpayer provided office budgets. On that note I would like to confirm that both my Penticton and West Kelowna offices operate under these principles in a non partisan manner. Office budgets are very carefully managed for maximum savings and political activities of any kind are not allowed. It is important for me that citizens have access to non partisan offices that are focused on areas of citizens' concerns and providing information as opposed to political objectives. If you have further question on this or any subject before the House of Commons please contact my office directly. As the House of Commons is not sitting during this shortened week, I am in Okanagan-Coquihalla and welcome hearing from you. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **May 27<sup>th</sup>**

This week is another very active one in Ottawa. On Monday our Government tabled a motion to extend the House of Commons sitting hours until midnight each evening to allow for more opportunity to debate the many bills still moving through the House. At the time of writing, the motion for extended hours has so far been supported by the Liberals and opposed by the NDP.

One of the Bills up for debate this week that I have spoken in support of is Bill C-17 "Protecting Canadians from Unsafe Drugs Act"- also known as "Vanessa`s law" as a result of the untimely passing of a 15 year old girl who was prescribed the drug "Prepulsid" that subsequently caused a fatal heart attack.

Ultimately this tragedy has illustrated that Canada`s drug protection laws are out of date and in my view do not provide sufficient protections for Canadians.

As I shared in the House of Commons that under our current Food and Drug Act, if a drug poses an unacceptable risk to patient health only the drug manufacturers can initiate a recall. In other words it is up to the manufacturer to determine whether or not a health risk is serious enough to warrant a recall. Health Canada plays a secondary role. In fact, under our current laws Government cannot step in and order a manufacturer to recall a drug that is unsafe. Where our existing laws become more bizarre is that if something like a candy bar is deemed unsafe to the public- the Minister of Health can issue a recall. To summarize: the Minister of Health can issue recalls for dangerous and unsafe foods,

but not for dangerous and unsafe drugs. In my view this is completely unacceptable and why I am supporting Bill C-17 that proposes to remedy this by ensuring the Minister of Health has mandatory recall power to compel a manufacturer to recall a drug if it is determined to present a serious or imminent risk of injury to Canadians. Bill C-17 also applies to medical devices and provides significantly increased fines and potential for prison time in circumstances of very serious offences. Health Canada will also retain flexibility to provide exemptions in special circumstances where unique health care considerations exist.

Another new measure approved this week that is long overdue are changes that will allow airline passengers to use portable electronic devices for the entire duration of a flight including takeoff and landings, provided the device is in non-transmitting "airplane mode". These changes are enabled through an exemption to the Canadian Aviation Regulations and require individual airlines to apply for the exemption and implement specific measures that incorporate these changes. It is estimated airlines may require 6 months to a year to complete this process.

I would also like to thank District of West Kelowna Mayor Findlater, council and staff for extremely constructive and valuable input on Canada's gas tax program. Last summer I was fortunate that our Prime Minister and Government caucus MPs from British Columbia accepted my invitation to meet in West Kelowna. During our meetings the leadership from West Kelowna was able to provide very specific suggestions on how gas tax funding can work better for municipalities and local government. These changes were also largely endorsed by other communities such as Summerland and Kelowna. Working with MP Ron Cannan in Ottawa on these proposals and the BC caucus has been successful as the new gas tax agreement announced last week will result in our Okanagan-Coquihalla communities having access to more funding than under the previous deal and greater flexibility and options for projects that reflect local priorities. This stands as a good example of different levels of Government working together to reduce regulatory red tape and create a more efficient and workable process.

If you have any comments, questions or concerns on any matter before the House of Commons I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **June 2014**

### **June 3<sup>rd</sup>**

With the House of Commons now sitting until midnight for the remainder of this session and with record temperatures being recorded in Ottawa, it is fair to say that the atmosphere has become heated and at times highly partisan on certain issues. Two of the most contentious issues this week included the ongoing investigation into the potential misuse of House of Commons funds by the NDP for partisan political purposes and more recently the appointment of a new Privacy Commissioner.

In both circumstances the Government and Liberals have been in agreement to further the investigation into NDP House resource spending and more recently the Liberals have supported the Government appointment of long time civil servant Daniel Therrien as Canada's new Privacy

Commissioner.

Our Prime Minister will be departing for Europe this week and along for the flight will be a delegation of Canadian veterans, including a veteran from Okanagan-Coquihalla to participate in ceremonies recognizing the 70th anniversary of the Normandy invasion. We should never forget the thousands of Canadian soldiers who lost their lives in the Normandy campaign.

Also occurring this week will be the release of an important new report from the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. This report is the result of a comprehensive review of the New Veterans Charter and I can attest that local veterans have been supportive of a thorough review by the committee. Although I am not a member of this committee, I do make a point of covering for absent members where possible as I believe that this is an important issue to many citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla. Based on my participation at these meetings and from comments from the other members, there is all party support recognizing the importance of this report in suggesting further improvements to the New Veterans Charter.

There will also be a number of Bills before the House this week including Bills C-27- "The Veterans Hiring Act", Bill C-35 "Justice for Animals in Service Act", Bill C-32 "The Victims Bill of Rights Act", Bill C-18- "The Agricultural Growth Act", Bill C-20- "Canada-Honduras Economic Growth and Prosperity Act" and Bill C-21- "The Red Tape Reduction Act". There will also be a number of private member's bills and motions coming before the House on a variety of different subjects including the presentation of petitions.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the many citizens who took the time to voice support for Bill C-17 "Protecting Canadians from Unsafe Drugs Act" that I referenced in last week's MP report. From time to time there are bills that draw extremely wide support from a very diverse segment of citizens; without exception every citizen I heard from supports the ability of Government to have more options for issuing recalls against dangerous drugs and medical devices that can potentially compromise patient safety as proposed in Bill C-17. I can also pass on that Bill C-17 has since received all party support to move on to Committee stage review.

If you have a comment, question or concern on any matter or Bill before the House of Commons, I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **June 10<sup>th</sup>**

As I submit my MP reports on a weekly basis often the number of events that can occur within a seven day time frame are significant and difficult to fit into a single 550 word weekly update. At other times no words can describe some events that are truly shocking and disturbing in magnitude. Such is the immense sense of loss Canadians share on the tragic death of three members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Moncton. On behalf of all citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla our thoughts and prayers are with the families and members of the RCMP who have suffered so greatly from a senseless act of violence. I would also like to publicly recognize the service and sacrifice of all members of the RCMP who bravely protect our communities while defending the law. This can be a demanding and dangerous job. The first RCMP officer killed in the line of duty happened in the early 1870's. Since that time up to the present incident in Moncton



two hundred and thirty four RCMP officers have lost their lives while on duty– including at least five in our riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla. Let us all pass on our condolences to the RCMP family during this difficult time.

As the House of Commons has been sitting until midnight for the past weeks a large number of bills have been before the House. One of those to be introduced is Bill C-36 “Protection of Communities and Exploited Person Act”– also referred to as the prostitution bill. This bill is in response to the Supreme Court of Canada striking down provision of Canada’s former laws in this area. Bill C-36 proposes a different framework on Canada’s prostitution laws in recognizing that many of those who sell sex do so for a variety of reasons that may include being forced or induced by others, to feed an addiction, poverty or other. Bill C-36 proposes to criminalize those who purchase or otherwise profit from the sale of sexual services. In other words pimps, johns, drug dealers, human traffickers and smugglers would face increased fines and potential for imprisonment for engaging in acts of sexual exploitation. These fines and potential prison sentences would increase if offences involve children or occur in locations where children may be present.

To assist in facilitating these objectives it is proposed that the advertising of sexual services would also be banned and \$20 million of new funding will be made available to help provide supports for those currently engaged in prostitution activities to help transition away from these activities. This is a summarized review of Bill C-36 and more detailed information can be obtained from my office.

Each week I enjoy hearing from many constituents on a variety of different topics– while concerns are often unique at times there as some issues that will often unite citizens in support or opposition. One issue that generally most citizens are supportive of is eliminating Government waste – with that in mind one program that has been successful in this regard is Industry Canada’s Computers for Schools program. Each year Government, and other private sector business partners frequently upgrade computer systems that at times may result existing computers becoming surplus. The Computers for Schools program takes these surplus computers, refurbishes them, and distributes these computers to schools, libraries, not-profit learning organizations and aboriginal communities across Canada. This program over the next 4 years will distribute roughly 280,000 computers thanks in part to corporate partners such as CN Rail, Bell, Telus, and CIBC (to name a few) who join with Government in the donation of surplus computers and hardware. Last year close to 7,500 computers were distributed in British Columbia and another shipment was announced last week with several hundred coming to schools in Okanagan Coquihalla. If you are interested in donating or are an eligible organization interested in receiving a computer forms can be obtained from the [Computers for Schools website](#).

If you have a question, comment or concern on any matter before the House of Common I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or 1-800-665-8711.

**June 18<sup>th</sup>**

This week the Government of Canada has accepted the recommendation from the Joint Review Panel regarding the Northern Gateway project. What this decision means is that the proponent must now demonstrate how (and if) it can meet and satisfy the 209 conditions that were identified from the National Energy Board JRP review process. Based on some of the feedback I have been hearing in response to this decision there are in some circumstances a misunderstanding on this process and what this decision really means.

I believe it is important to recognize that this week's announcement does not mean shovels will soon hit the ground with construction getting underway to build the Northern Gateway project. Ultimately this week's decision is another step in a very lengthy and detailed process that will now see the proponent attempt to establish and identify how the 209 conditions will be met. Additional consultations with Aboriginal communities will be required where many (but not all) have established concerns and in some cases outright opposition to this project. There are also additional conditions that have been put forward from the BC Provincial Government as well as litigation pending and in some cases already underway.

Aside from those challenges for greater context of some of the regulatory requirements that also remain in place from the various levels of Government the following acts apply: authorization under the Fisheries Act; Approval under the Indian Act to cross Reserves, authorization under the Federal Real Property and Federal Immovables Act, Authorization under the Canadian Transportation Act, Approval and licensing issued under the Explosives Act; permits and authorizations under the Water Act, Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, Public Lands Act, Alberta Forests Act, Historical Resources Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, Public Health Act, Alberta Weed Control Act, and the Public Highways Act.

Some of the British Columbia permits and authorizations include the Forest Act, Forest and Range Practices Act, Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act, Weed Control Act, Land Act, Agricultural Land Commission Act, Fisheries Act, Fisheries Protection Act, Water Act, Environmental Management Act, Wildlife Act, Heritage Conservation Act, Transportation Act, and Industrial Roads Act. In total between the Federal, BC and Alberta provincial Governments there are over 100 different regulatory obligations involved.

The above list is only a sample of some of the many acts involved that would require approval and authorization over and above the 209 conditions established by the Joint Review Panel. Assuming all of these conditions can be met and satisfied (including regulatory compliance), like most projects of this magnitude a right of way would need to be acquired that would potentially involve further public hearings and dealings with affected landowners. This is only brief overview highlighting some of the many conditions and challenges that remain for the proponent to satisfy.

Why not just reject Gateway outright? This is a question I receive often from opponents of the Gateway project. Ultimately as Canadians we need to recognize that currently bitumen is increasingly being shipped by rail; rail as we know is a less safe form of transporting oil compared to pipelines which are safer and more efficient. We also have to recognize that there is only so much rail capacity and if rail capacity is overtaken by oil, it will displace other important commodities and adversely affect other sectors of our Canadian economy, most likely agriculture. I think most would agree that is not acceptable.

We should also recognize that Canada has the third largest oil reserve in the world, but that is only if you consider 97% of that oil is in the oil sands. We have also learned that our economy and our future can be threatened if we do not diversify and expand our trading partners- to do that we need international market access and that in turn means infrastructure and access points. Gateway may or may not turn out not to be the solution but ultimately we need a transparent process that determines how we can safely and responsibly secure Canada's energy future.

Where do I stand? I support having an independent scientific process that will handle the expected 650 Billion dollars of investment over the next ten years in developing Canada's natural resources. While some would prefer that elected officials take a "just say no" approach to resource development in my view a balance can be achieved with responsible resource development which creates jobs and supports our local communities. To arbitrarily abandon development without due process through political intervention will ultimately chase investment away; this not only negates the well paying jobs, but no investment means no innovation in cleaner or more efficient methods. If we do not have new pipelines, we will have old ones, plus rail cars and truck transport carrying our product.

How we secure and maximize the best possible return for Canadians on our energy future is part of an important discussion on how we can build a stronger Canada.

I welcome your views on this or any subject before the House of Commons. I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **June 24<sup>th</sup>**

This past week, the Government announced significant changes to many classifications within the temporary foreign worker program (TFWP). Reaction to these changes has been diverse and includes comments that range from suggesting the changes do not go far enough to suggestions the changes in many cases are so significant that they amount to the phasing out of the program. As is often the case in areas of complex regulation, there is some misunderstanding in that some aspects of the program have been far more significantly changed than others. There are also unique considerations that apply in some classifications that do not apply in others. The limited space in this report does not make it possible to itemize all of the changes; however I will pass on a few examples based on questions that are commonly asked.

One of the larger questions that in some quarters is also a debate, is the question: are changes to the temporary foreign worker program required? I have certainly heard from some employers who have expressed views on the importance of the TFWP, however I have also met with unemployed workers and families of unemployed workers unable to secure a job. By the numbers the total use of the TFWP program was just over 48,500 temporary foreign workers in 2002 and has grown every year since up to 2009 where the program peaked at just over 142,000 foreign workers and as of 2013 is close to 127,000. For a further breakdown of the 2013 numbers close to 17,000 were live in caregivers, close to 28,000 were in the seasonal agricultural worker program combined with a further 40,000 workers in other low skilled labour categories. In total low skilled TFW program use accounted for roughly 85,000 workers compared to just under 42,000 temporary foreign workers in the high skilled

categories.

What changes are being proposed under the new regulations? Some categories, such as the live in caregiver program will remain unchanged however for other programs the former labour market opinion (LMO) will now be expanded into a Labor Market Impact Assessment (LMIA). The LMIA process requires an employer to submit how many Canadians applied for the job in question, in turn how many Canadians applicants were interviewed, and the reasons why those Canadians were not hired. In addition employers are also required to acknowledge new rules that prohibit Canadians from being laid-off or having hours reduced at a worksite employing temporary foreign workers. Other changes to the TFW program include a 10% cap limit on the number of TFW workers that an employer can use as a percentage of the workforce. Existing employers currently over this limit will be granted a transition period to adjust. Another change in the TFW program is that certain classifications of employment will be subject to local unemployment rates as part of the TFW application process. There are a number of conditions that apply however if the annual unemployment rate is over 6% in a specific region for a job classification the employer may be prevented from accessing the TFW program. For employers who are successful in receiving approval for using a temporary foreign worker in the low wage categories the duration of the permit will be one year shortened from the existing 2 year expiry date.

This report is only a brief summary of some of the many changes to the temporary foreign worker program. Many of the changes not mentioned in this report are specific and unique to various employers within our local economies. For the past week I have been hearing from many business owners over these changes. It should also be pointed out that the application fee for an LMIA is now set at \$1,000 compared to \$250 for the former LMO. These are significant increases for many business owners who do use the program although these new fees are established to recover the administrative costs of operating the temporary foreign worker program so that it is funded by those who use the TFW program and not subsidized by taxpayers or other businesses who do not use the program. I welcome your comments on this or any issue before the House of Commons. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **July 2014**

### **July 2<sup>nd</sup>**

The Canada Day long weekend is easily my favourite time of year. It's when Canadians from all walks of life join together in celebration for all that we love about our great country. This Canada Day I was able to attend Canada Day ceremonies and festivities in Okanagan Falls, Penticton, Summerland, Peachland, West Kelowna, Merritt and Logan Lake. The drive around Okanagan-Coquihalla serves not only as a reminder of what a truly beautiful region we live in but also of the many great people who live here. In every community I visited there were many families taking the time to get involved and sharing in all that we love about Canada. I would also like to thank so many people for taking the time to offer greetings and give their input to me. Hearing directly from people firsthand is some of the most valuable and insightful feedback that I receive and is part of why each summer I travel around our region as part of my summer listening tour. For my 2014 summer listening tour I would like to invite citizens, groups and organizations along with employers to contact my office to arrange a time for a meeting. Please contact me at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1(800)665-8711 as I

find July and August often pass by quickly and I would like to meet with as many citizens as possible.

On the subject of feedback I would also like to thank the many individuals who have taken the time to express concern on the potential threat from invasive species such as freshwater mussels to freshwater lakes in our region. These concerns obviously apply to a large amount of lakes throughout British Columbia and the strong concern shown locally is helpful in my work in Ottawa. The need to take proactive action and for all level of Government to work together on this issue is an important one and is an issue that I continue to pursue in Ottawa on a regular basis. I would also like to recognize again the work of the Okanagan Basin Water Board in championing this issue to all levels of Government and for creating an awareness campaign that citizens can more easily participate in.

This week's report will be a shorter one for a change however I would like to thank the growing number of people who take the time to read my weekly reports and offer comments and questions. Last fall, a Summerland resident passed on some concerns over a Federal program that was creating challenges in a local sector of our economy. These concerns allowed me to make contact with many stakeholders within the sector in question and ultimately to identify these concerns and bring them forward in Ottawa. Recently changes were made to the program in question and specific regulatory changes were made that will resolve the previously identified challenges. Without the initial feedback from the individual in Summerland it is possible these changes may not have been made, or not as quickly. This is not the first time a local citizen has provided input that is helpful for policy related changes and from my perspective this helps to demonstrate the importance of local feedback and questions from citizens.

It is often pointed out that Canada is a diverse and resourceful country. Canada Day is an important reminder that while our great diversity helps to establish our uniquely Canadian character it is our ability to set aside our differences and work together in building a stronger Canada for all Canadians that is a true legacy of what we celebrate on Canada Day. Thank you for the honour to serve as one of your elected representatives.

## **July 9<sup>th</sup>**

The first week of my summer listening tour has been a very productive and interesting one. Many of the citizens I have spoken to have diverse views and also some unique ideas and suggestions. One suggestion that I have heard from a few different citizens involves renaming Old Age Security (OAS) to Elder Security or something along those lines. As always I welcome your input and suggestion on this or other matters before the House of Commons

Another more recent subject I have heard a number of comments about is the current Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) "Let's talk TV – A conversation with Canadians" review on subjects such as television programming delivery and availability. More specifically the comments I have heard pertain to a submission from the CBC that proposes users and subscribers of "over the top streaming services" (such as is provided by Netflix) are charged an additional tax on their monthly bill. This particular tax revenue would be provided to the Canadian Media Fund who in turn uses this fund to subsidize Canadian television production that often appears on the CBC and other networks such as Bell, Shaw and Rogers (to name a few). Currently the subscribers of over the top streaming services are exempted from being taxed by this fund. Many of the comments I have heard to date come from Netflix subscribers who object to being taxed to fund television production they do not watch or in some cases

even subscribe to. This is a subject I welcome your views on that can also be shared directly with the CRTC at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/talktv-parlonstele.htm>

Before I close this week I would like to thank the many citizens who took the time to sign the petition opposing the release of convicted mass murderer David Ennis (formerly David Shearing) who is currently serving a life sentence for the murder of the Johnson-Bentley family from West Kelowna. This is an issue I have heard serious concern from many citizens throughout Okanagan-Coquihalla and they are strongly opposed to David Ennis being released. I would also like to recognize the former classmates and other citizens who have been seriously impacted by horrific violence who have made significant efforts to gather signatures and will be presenting them at the upcoming parole hearing in September.

As my summer listening tour is now underway I welcome opportunities to meet with you to hear your comments, questions and concerns first hand. To arrange an appointment I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800665-8711.

### **July 16<sup>th</sup>**

To date I have been greatly enjoying my summer listening tour- the opportunity to meet with citizens, organizations and employers firsthand is very valuable and helpful in the work that I do as a Member of Parliament. I also find that consistently the issues raised by citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla are very different than many of the topics raised by the media in Ottawa. At times there seems a strong disconnect. In Ottawa I find increasingly that the views and opinions of experts are often pushed to the forefront, while the views and opinions of every day citizens fall to the wayside and that should represent a growing concern to all of us.

As an example during the debate on the Fair Elections Act, one of the key areas of disagreement was over the reasonableness of requiring ID to vote in a Federal election no differently from what is used in local elections where a Mayor or council, rural director or school trustee are elected. The reality is the requirement on how reasonable it is to produce ID to vote is a matter of opinion- one that all Canadians can and should feel entitled to have or share. Yet in Ottawa the opposition and some in the media suggest that these are matters for expert opinion and that everyday Canadians voices are somehow lesser or don't count. By not being inclusive in our institutions and processes we risk ignoring, perhaps even alienating individual Canadians. This leads to another subject that I believe is worthy of consideration- the Supremacy of Parliament.

What is the Supremacy of Parliament and why should you care? A fundamental principle of democracy is that ultimately citizens, through the democratic process, can elect a government they believe is best suited to make the decisions, policy and draft laws, that in our case will help build a stronger Canada. Obviously in any democratically diverse society there is a difference of opinion on these subjects and that is why we have elections. It should also be pointed out a Government that citizens disagree with can also be voted out of power. Where does the Supremacy of Parliament come in? To illustrate the answer to this question I will use an example: in 2009 a Liberal MP introduced Bill C-428 that proposed newly immigrated citizens could begin collecting OAS retirement benefits within three years of arriving in Canada (assuming they were 65 or older) rather than wait the ten year residency requirement. The outrage from Canadians opposing this bill was significant- in fact to this very day I still receive frequent opposition from citizens to this bill. What happened to Bill C-428? In a word: democracy. Ultimately an election occurred and the Liberal MP who authored Bill C-428 was not re-elected. In other words the bill was defeated through our democratic process.

To illustrate the Supremacy of Parliament, suppose after the election instead of accepting electoral defeat of the Member and the bill, that a court challenge was mounted and a judge then declared Bill C-428 to be a charter right and ordered that newly arrived citizens to Canada could begin collecting OAS benefits within three years of residency in spite of the fact that Canadians opposed this bill and voted against it. In essence an un-elected and unaccountable judge would have enacted policy against the democratic will of an elected Government. In essence this is where the Supremacy of Parliament is a consideration– should democratically elected Government set policy or un-elected judges? To be clear, this is for some an easy answer and to others a point of considerable debate. Courts can provide valuable guidance in complex cases as not everything can be anticipated when drafting law; however to see policies rewritten that download cost to taxpayers without representation is a concern we should be mindful of. The intent here is not to persuade opinion but rather to provoke discussion on this subject. While my example of Bill C-428 is a hypothetical one, in reality a recent case has provided further grist for the mill on this topic.

In 2012 our Government made changes to health care coverage for refugee claimants attempting to seek permanent entry into Canada. At the time it was noted that the refugee health care plan was more generous than the health care plans available to and paid by Canadian taxpayers. It was also observed that some of the refugee claimants accessing our taxpayer financed medical plan were coming from free, democratic rule of law countries such as the United States. As a result of these and other factors, changes were made by our Government to the refugee health program to ensure that legitimate refugee claimants were recognized and that abuses could not take place. Recently (as you may have heard) a Federal Court judge has ruled that the changes made by the Government contradict the Charter and has ruled against them. Our Government believes it is unfair for Canadians to pay the costs of a health care program for asylum seekers that is more generous than what they themselves receive and to exclude illegitimate claims. As a result our Government is appealing this ruling. This is a decision that some citizens are very supportive of and others strongly oppose. I welcome your views on this or any subject before the House of Commons. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

**July 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Last week I wrote an MP report on a variety of subjects that also included the concern of interest groups using the courts on issues that they often fail to advance through a democratically elected Government. It is a situation that all levels of Government including municipalities, regional districts, provincial and federal government & related agencies deal with and one that taxpayers pay the bills for. It should also not be overlooked in our democratic process there is often disclosure on expense and assets of public office holders as well political donation limits (in some cases) and other safeguards to protect the public interest. Very few of these public disclosure and transparency measures apply in our judicial system.

Ultimately the intent of my report last week was to raise concerns I have heard from local citizens on this subject and also to start a discussion requesting further feedback from local citizens. Within a day

of the report being published, a follow up radio interview was arranged out of Ottawa along with a number of related print and social media articles and within 72 hours a conversation from all parts of Canada was well underway.

The intent of this week's report is not to recycle the subject from last week but rather to point out the significant importance of the internet and how that can enhance our ability to communicate, to do business and to share ideas and discussion all across Canada at a very rapid pace much as was experienced with last week's MP report. News, events, commerce, education, civic engagement and more is all readily available to citizens of all ages as the Internet has become integrated into our society. Unfortunately for a segment of our citizens they are regrettably entirely shut out of the same online opportunities that so many take for granted. In some areas of Canada (and this includes parts of Okanagan-Coquihalla) there is no internet availability or wireless connectivity available.

A lack of cellular service in some regions also creates added challenges for emergency responders and those who may require their assistance.

In response to unserved areas of Canada our Government has introduced the Connecting Canadians program that has a goal of connecting roughly 280,000 Canadians who currently lack high-speed internet services. A target has been set that 98 percent of Canadian homes by 2017 will have access to Internet services with a speed of 5 megabytes per second.

How will this work? The first step is to identify those areas of Canada that are currently lacking in sufficient service. As part of my summer listening tour (I am more than happy to meet with you whether at my office or at your favourite coffee shop), I am hoping to hear from citizens who either are impacted by a lack of service or possibly have friends and families that are currently impacted. The next step after affected areas are identified will be for Internet Service Providers (ISP) to apply for grants to bring service into areas currently lacking. Some rural communities like Logan Lake have already shown interest in this program. This process is targeted to occur in the fall of this year so that grants can be awarded in the spring of 2015. Once the grants are distributed projects can begin and ideally by this time next year areas currently lacking internet services can be online and part of Canada's internet infrastructure. If you or someone you know currently lacks internet services please send further information to my office for follow up. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

Before I close I would like to sincerely thank the many fire crews, emergency first responders, members of local and regional government including literally hundreds of volunteers who have helped citizens during the recent forest fire activity in our region.

Being evacuated from your home with the threat of an advancing wildfire is a stressful time for families and the work of so many citizen volunteers to help accommodate citizens and pets is greatly appreciated by all involved. Canada Day may have passed for 2014 but there have been many days of late to give thanks for living in a country where so many come together to help their fellow citizens in times of need.

## **July 29<sup>th</sup>**

In late 2012 the community of Attawapiskat became a household name in large part due to a housing related crisis and again more recently on news that the former band co-manager has been charged with fraud. Frequently when there is a crisis situation or other unfortunate event or tragedy occurring within a first nation's community, it becomes a large media event with multiple news stories. Unfortunately the majority of first nations' success stories are often less known and I believe most would agree that is unfortunate.



In the Okanagan, many citizens are familiar with the success of both the Osoyoos and Westbank first nations. I have written previously that some have raised that the Penticton Indian band to date has not yet achieved similar progress. Fortunately this is changing- and at a rapid pace.

Over the past five years the Penticton Indian Band has established a day care program, changed the direction of its economic development, built a beautiful new school with increasing enrollment and attendance levels. It has also begun construction on a new residential community on band owned lands. Furthermore it is very close to begin construction on a new commercial development project.

Unfortunately all of these events combined have generated less provincial media attention than the Boonstock concert that will be held on locatee lands this upcoming long weekend. I make a point of mentioning that Boonstock is occurring on locatee lands as many mistakenly believe that a band chief & council directly control events that can occur on locatee lands. For further information on this topic please reference my March 25th, 2014 MP report: <http://www.danalbas.com/mp-reports/mp-report-for-okanagan-coquihalla-building-abridge-between-communities>

From my perspective it is important to recognize the progress of our first nations communities locally who have all taken different paths to increase economic initiatives but also being mindful of incorporating traditional first nations' culture.

It is for these reasons I invited Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Minister Bernard Valcourt to Okanagan-Coquihalla to meet with some local area chiefs and see firsthand the recent progress of the Penticton Indian Band and also of the considerable success of Osoyoos Indian Band. It was an honour to have the Minister accept the invitation and it was a productive visit. It provided some very beneficial learning opportunities, such as a youth roundtable where the Minister heard directly from young participants of a federal skills training pilot project, which was greatly appreciated. Also while Minister Valcourt was here he announced a federal contribution of support towards a proposed bridge crossing near Green Avenue. Some might remember the channelization process that occurred in the late 1950's. While it was seen at the time as a necessary improvement to help mitigate flood risk on both sides of the channel, this new bridge will offer new opportunities by providing better access to the lands that were severed.

As August will soon arrive, I am reminded that there is one month remaining for my summer listening tour. If you or your business or group would like to schedule a meeting please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or by phone at 1-800-665-8711.

## **August 2014**

### **August 6<sup>th</sup>**

Over the past few months during my annual summer listening tour I have met with a number of citizens, employers, groups and organizations to hear concerns, questions and suggestions from the many residents of Okanagan-Coquihalla. In turn I have taken these concerns forward to various departments and Ministers in Ottawa and will continue to actively work on many of the suggestions that are put forward on an ongoing basis. Some of the comments that were presented I have raised in my weekly reports; most recently raising the topic of judicial activism, an uncomfortable subject for some and a serious concern for others.

Although I have heard a large amount of opinions representing a wide spectrum of views this summer, one underlying theme is that many people appreciate the opportunity to have an open discussion. It may be less civil online but generally in person or on the phone citizens value being heard and more often than not hearing the reasons why Government supports some policy and projects and not others. In short it comes down to accountability– people deserve to be heard and not to be dismissed. If I have one pet peeve as a Member of Parliament it is when I take citizens concerns forward to Ottawa often to have those within the Ottawa bubble attempt to dismiss those concerns because they disagree with them politically or they do not fit into a certain narrative– much as I have experienced recently. I will say that I have a much better understanding why some elected officials tend not to speak out for fear of media repercussion.

One of the major reasons why I submit a weekly report and conduct listening tours, is that many citizens I hear from appreciate having the opportunity to have a firsthand conversation to hear the reasons why we as elected representatives voted on an issue of particular interest to them. This creates a direct line of accountability between individual citizens and their representative. If they disagree with the decision they will have a chance to vote accordingly at the next election. This ultimately is the essence of our democratic process. Recently an outgoing city councillor made an observation questioning the political relationships that occur in smaller municipalities between elected officials and other prominent citizens that could possibly affect their local community grants process. It was again an uncomfortable discussion for some however that does not negate the validity of the subject. The larger question is how can we improve upon these things?

Ultimately if we are to run for public office we cannot be afraid to speak out and share the concerns of the citizens we represent, a principle that should apply to all levels of public office. Accountability also means transparency. As elected officials we are paid with your tax dollars– our expenses, our operating budgets, benefits, the fiscal and policy decisions including projects and programs are all costly. This is why initiatives like open data ([www.data.gc.ca](http://www.data.gc.ca)) and open government ([www.data.gc.ca/eng/open-government](http://www.data.gc.ca/eng/open-government)) are there to provide more of this information to taxpayers with increased ease of access. To find out who has met with me or any other MP on a particular special interest you can go to the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada ([www.ocl-cal.gc.ca](http://www.ocl-cal.gc.ca)). As elected officials we are also doing more voluntarily disclosure as well as audited disclosure. I know firsthand that my annual accountability report generated a record number of responses in support and that is why it is now an annual document. Citizens want more transparency from all levels of Government– it is an important principle and one that we can continue to improve upon. Citizens have also shared concerns that deserve to be heard even if they are unpopular in some quarters. These are some of the items I have heard these past few months and look forward to hearing more concerns and taking those concerns forward. I welcome your comments at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

### **August 13<sup>th</sup>**

Recently I have received a number of inquiries on the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. In large part the comments have been raised over the financial disclosure (as required under the law) that a BC First Nations Chief from the Kwikwetlem First Nation received over \$914,000 in the 2013/2014 fiscal year. Further commentary occurred this week when it was reported that if elected to government, the leader of the Liberal Party would scrap the new First Nations Financial Transparency Act. The bill was opposed by the Liberals in the House of Commons. This leads to the question: what is the First Nations Financial Transparency Act?

A brief summary of this Act which recently came into force is that it requires First Nations to publicly disclose consolidated financial statements that include financial information on how much individual First Nations leaders are being paid, including expenses. In short the same type of information that is publicly available from other levels of government. Why the need to make this disclosure requirement a law? It should be pointed out that in some cases there are First Nations communities that have, for some time, voluntarily provided this information to band members. However in other cases this information was unavailable and in some situations band members were unsuccessful in having this information provided to them. Some have suggested that this may dissuade interested band members from inquiring further out of fear of repercussion. In these situations the only recourse for a band member was to appeal directly to the Minister of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Rather than have the Minister deal with such requests on an ad hoc basis a more fair and balanced approach is to create a standard that applies equally across the board to ensure information can be easily found by band members. Accountability is a basic principle of democratic governance and it is important for all elected officials to be held to account by the citizens who elect them. Increased information through disclosure can also help provide clarity and put to rest allegations and rumours that may be unhelpful and not factual.

My thoughts on this legislation? As most will know I support increased accountability; however it is also important to recognize that while one chief is paid \$914,000, in our riding for example, the Chief of the Lower Nicola First Nation was paid just over \$25,000 during the same period. It is also worth recognizing that some Chiefs also serve as the Band's economic development officer; an added responsibility that may understandably increase annual compensation. I have recently been asked whether or not elected officials should be allowed to serve as employees, particularly if they are the ones who are in charge of compensation as well as hiring? These are good governance questions for First Nation communities. We should note that bands themselves have also become far more complex operations than many citizens may realize. For example, the Penticton Indian Band in the 2012/2013 fiscal period received Federal funding in excess of \$9 million to provide many critical services to band members. As these are significant amounts with many services involved, increased accountability through the First Nations Financial Transparency Act is, in my view helpful to provide more information for all involved.

Now that the First Nations Financial Transparency Act has come into force and some would prefer it was scrapped, I would also be interested in hearing your thoughts on this new legislation. As always I welcome all comments and questions on this or on other Federal matters and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free at 1-800-665-8711.

## **August 20<sup>th</sup>**

The subject of internal trade has been a prominent one recently in large part as our Government has recently launched the "One Canada, one national economy" initiative to together identify and choose strategies that can increase internal trade. One of the more obvious remedies to increase internal trade is to identify and remove barriers that prevent inter provincial trade from occurring... an action that sounds relatively simple yet in practice is more difficult to achieve.

Why is internal trade important? One example comes courtesy of a local winemaker who recently shared a success story on doing a large business deal in Asia where wine grown and produced here in Okanagan-Coquihalla will be sold there. It is worth pointing out that in spite of it now being legal to ship wine across Provincial borders this same BC wine still cannot be sold directly to consumers in Ontario for the simple reason the Ontario Government continues to oppose it. Fortunately the

Manitoba Provincial Government in contrast has been more progressive and allows direct to consumer wine shipments.

Trade barriers are not just restricted to commodities; these barriers can also apply to labour. For example a nurse who is highly educated and with many years of on the job experience in one Province may not meet standards in another. In some areas of Canada where there is a particular skills shortage these certification challenges can create labour mobility problems. Trade barriers can also affect entire sectors. As an example in some regions of Canada, restrictive Provincial policy has made it more difficult for agricultural products such as apples, certain dairy products including cheese and canola to move freely between Provinces.

What is more surprising is that in 1995, all Canadian Provinces have signed on to a document known as the AIT (Agreement on Internal Trade) that also has provision on dispute resolution mechanisms. The AIT disputes seldom receive much media attention however it has not been uncommon over the years for various Provinces to challenge other Provinces restrictive policies that prevent movement of goods and labour. Overall there has been just 55 disputes over the past nineteen years- on average less than three disputes a year of all Canadian Provinces and territories, the only exception being Nunavut that instead has observer status.

Why does this matter? Over my listening tour this summer I have had a chance to visit with a number of local small business owners. Many of our most successful local employers are increasingly depending on trade as a key part of their business. In fact it is quite impressive the market reach that many Okanagan-Coquihalla small business owners have achieved: some Cherry growers are now selling into destinations as far away as Hong Kong. Many of these new markets have been opened up as part of trade deals negotiated with other countries. Twenty years ago when the AIT agreement was first signed off on Canada had just two free trade agreements signed. Today Canada has negotiations concluded or agreements in progress with forty-three different countries representing over 1 billion potential new customers worldwide.

This all takes me back to the original example of the local winemaker who recent did a deal in Asia that he could not legally do in Ontario. If we continue to turn our back on internal trade barriers, we will increasingly see more of our local production going offshore. While it is critically important to have a diversified trading network to create stability in our local economies we must also recognize that there are both market, labour and environmental efficiencies in supporting increased internal trade. We can also provide more value to educational training opportunities if those skills can be employed Canada wide and not selectively in certain provinces. Ultimately as Canadians one of our unique qualities is a deep level of understanding that in spite of our vastness and diversity we are always stronger when we are as a country united as opposed to one divided. Supporting increased internal trade is one way we can continue to build a stronger Canada. I welcome your comments on this or any subject related to the House of Commons and can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or by phone at 1-800-665-8711.

**August 27<sup>th</sup>**

For those of you who follow my reports frequently you may recall a previous incident I reported on that involved a dance instructor located in the Merritt area who was in Canada working under the temporary foreign worker program. Unfortunately due to what can be described as a series of administrative errors and the slow turning wheels of bureaucracy, ultimately the instructor was required to leave Canada for a period of time before the situation could be resolved. As I also

mentioned in that same report the temporary foreign worker program is not an immigration program meaning that there are fewer avenues available to address challenges such as these when they occur. I am happy to report that after a rather significant amount of effort across the board, this dance instructor has again returned to Canada and hopefully in the near future will resume providing dance lessons to children in the Nicola Valley. Throughout this process one of the challenges that I observed is the requirement for Government to ensure that all terms and conditions of a program are in compliance. Part of the compliance process requires producing many documents that verify information that has been requested. This is of course can be frustrating for all involved not to mention time consuming and at times it can be easy to overlook why such a thorough verification process is established.

Over the course of this summer another situation arose in a different community involving temporary foreign workers, although this time in a different program related to seasonal agricultural workers. As is often a limitation in these situations there is not a significant amount of information that can be shared, however what can be passed on is that two seasonal agricultural workers found themselves in an unacceptable and deplorable situation. In this case an intervention occurred and fortunately these workers are no longer in a perilous situation however I believe it is also important to recognize that it was the good nature of kind hearted neighbours who became aware of this issue and took action on it. Whenever these situations occur it is in my view important for elected officials to review the circumstances and related policy to try and ensure that a similar situation does not occur again in the future. I have heard of the importance to our agriculture sector from a number of small and medium sized farm operations and other businesses who rely heavily on this program to remain viable and competitive. It is also imperative that we not overlook the importance for government programs to provide transparency so that members of the public can support a process with confidence. No citizen or government would tolerate these kinds of abuse, whether it is localized or widespread. The industry itself must also recognize that it is in its own best interest to continue to encourage best practices and not just compliance. In other words, a balance must be created that is workable for farmers and for seasonal agricultural workers that will retain broad public support. This is an area I believe is deserving of more attention and I would like to welcome your comments on this or any other subject before the House of Commons.

Before I close this report I would like to sincerely recognize the efforts by local citizens, who in spite of language barriers came together to help two individuals who were truly in need. This act of kindness made a difference and will not be forgotten by the individuals involved. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

### **September 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Over this past summer I have been fortunate to receive some favourable comments in a local editorial on my work as a Member of Parliament and also have been the subject of some rather intense criticism for raising a subject that some citizens had strong opposing views on. Being in the middle of a media firestorm and the target of some opposing citizens is overall not an enjoyable experience; however it is a very important one. In a vibrant democracy in a country as diverse as Canada we expect disagreement and a difference of views. It is understandable that we would prefer opposition to be neatly delivered, constructive and without personal attacks or profanity; however we also recognize that citizens at times express points of views in unique ways. This can all be unpleasant for certain but we should also not overlook that ultimately when people make an effort to pass on questions, comments or views they are attempting to engage in our democratic process- a good thing indeed.

I mention these things due to the fact that in one municipality within Okanagan-Coquihalla, a local government is reported to have threatened litigation against a senior citizen who can be quite vocal on local issues of importance. As an elected official I can relate to the fact that at times we have critics who can be quite aggressive and we would prefer that they communicate in a more civil tone. It should also be pointed out that if a citizen is behaving in such a manner, that elected officials, if necessary through government, can state reasons why a certain behaviours are not tolerated and responses to vitriolic or vexatious inquiries not provided. Drawing a line between legitimate but uncomfortable inquiry and harsh or impassioned language is a difficult task and should be taken with care. In my view when local officials sanction legal means to attempt to silence members of the public, it crosses a line and that is a concern that I believe we should all share.

Withstanding criticism is never enjoyable however if we are to lead in public office at times difficult and unpopular decisions will be required to be made. Accepting criticism for those decisions is part of the process. We should also recognize that our more senior levels of government at the Provincial & Federal level were structured by design to have a funded and working opposition with certain legal and traditional immunities to raise issues when in legislative chambers. In Municipal Government, particularly in small to mid-sized communities, where there is no formal funded official opposition; often the opposition may well be from members of the public, who in this case we are reminded, may have no legal immunity to raise issues of concern.

The intent of this week's report is to recognize that while criticism can be at times difficult to accept, it remains an important part of governance and elected office. Criticism, in my view is not something we should fear nor shy away from and most importantly should not attempt to silence. There is little doubt that some will criticize my report this week. From my general observation there are far fewer subjects that receive complete agreement than the vast amount of subjects that citizens agree to disagree on. That is the sign of a healthy democracy where citizens enjoy the freedom to express opposing views without fear of repercussion. I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

## **September 10<sup>th</sup>**

Next week the House of Commons will again be in session as the fall sitting gets underway with a heavy schedule from now until late December. While there will be many bills coming before the House, one of the more anticipated debates will on be the Reform Act of 2014, a Private Member's Bill from my Conservative colleague MP Michael Chong. This bill has a number of democratic reform proposals in it that continues to generate a strong amount of feedback from citizens and is a debate that promises to be very engaging. From a local perspective I have had a number of responses on this Bill and will continue to provide updates on the progress of it in the House of Commons.

Another important topic that may be the subject of debate is the deployment of a limited number of Canadian armed forces personnel to Iraq to work in a non combat capacity with American forces personnel advising Iraqi military forces. The purpose of this joint effort is to provide expertise on how Iraqi security forces can better protect innocent citizens against the threat of ISIL. The initial Canadian deployment is for 30 days and includes providing strategic and tactical advice to Iraqi forces but does not include a combat role. In response to the announcement the NDP raised concerns around mission creep while the Liberals offered their support for the deployment. From my own perspective there is no question that the deplorable tactics and actions of terrorist groups against innocent civilians are serious and represent very real concerns to all Canadians. Canada has a long history of opposing tyranny and protecting innocent civilians from brutality and acts of terrorism. I also recognize that serious conflict is a subject that Canadians have diverse views on and should never be taken lightly. I

will continue to provide updates on this subject and welcome comments and questions in this or any subject coming before the House of Commons.

As I am soon off to Ottawa I would like to thank the many citizens, groups, organization and businesses that took the time to share concerns with me over my summer listening tour. This input was helpful for me and there are a number of items that I will be taking forward to Ottawa for follow up on as the fall session gets underway. I should also add there are still some unresolved and ongoing issues that I continue to actively work on and am hoping for resolution in the near future. I will provide more information on these topics in the coming months as well. If you have a comment, question or concern I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

## September 17<sup>th</sup>

This has been a very busy week in Ottawa as the 2nd session of 41st Parliament is again underway. Some of the Bills before the House this week include Senate Bill S-3 "An Act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act" and Government Bill C-3 "Safeguarding Canada's Seas and Skies Act". Also up for debate this week is Private Members Bill C-586 "Reform Act of 2014" from my Conservative colleague MP Michael Chong. The Reform Act continues to be one of the bills that I have received a considerable amount of feedback on recently and as a result have been following the bill closely.

One aspect of the Reform Act that is of interest is how it proposes to change the current political structure of our electoral process. To highlight this I will provide a more current example: during the most recent nomination process to select the leader of the Liberal party it is reported that over 104,000 people participated in their democratic process that resulted in 80% voting for one individual who was then declared Leader of the Liberal Party. What is interesting about the Reform Act is that it proposes a legal mechanism where a majority of MPs from a party caucus can vote to replace the democratically elected leader and replace that democratically elected leader with an appointed one. To use the example from the Liberal Party again this means that with 37 Liberal MPs in the House of Commons it would require only 19 Liberal MPs to replace the current leader. The Reform Act also proposes that a majority vote of caucus can determine the interim replacement leader. In other words, the same majority of party MPs who would agree to vote out a democratically elected leader selected by the grassroots of their party would be free to vote in their own preferred replacement as an interim leader.

Some view this as enhancing democracy and are strongly supportive; others have voiced concern at the thought of a leader elected by tens of thousands of citizens could be over turned by a few dozen MPs. From my own perspective, one concern that I have is the potential for back room deals in Ottawa being made that could potentially create internal division and alienate citizens who participated in a transparent leadership selection process only to see that taken away for reasons that may never be publicly stated. The stated goal of the Reform Act is to increase the ability of individual MPs to overturn the leadership of a party as well as decisions involving party discipline efforts that can include suspensions from caucus and reinstatements. I would be remiss if I did not also point out that there are examples of leaders at both the Provincial and Federal level who have been successfully removed by caucus under existing process without legislation as proposed in the Reform Act.

This is only a brief summary involving some of the measures proposed in the Reform Act, there are others that unfortunately cannot be covered in detail in a single column. While my comments might come across as opposing the Reform Act that is not the intent in this report. Based on the feedback I

have received from citizens to date, the majority have stated support for the Reform Act; in conversation I have also discovered that many are unaware of some of the technical aspects the bill proposes. It should also be noted that further amendments have been proposed to the Reform Act at in the event the bill reaches Committee Stage review. I can confirm that I will be supporting the Reform Act at second reading debate, so that these proposals can be reviewed and vetted by committee and welcome further comments and questions on this or any Bill before the House. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or via phone at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## September 24<sup>th</sup>

As a week can go in Ottawa, this has been a very interesting one on Parliament Hill but as is often the case, some issues are widely reported over in favour of others. Based on questions, concerns and feedback I have heard from many citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla here are some updates on a few events this week.

Back in my July 9<sup>th</sup> MP report I mentioned a proposal submitted to the CRTC that could potentially create a tax on Netflix subscribers; this was in response to many citizens who had taken the time to voice opposition to such a taxation proposal. This week representatives from Netflix participated in a public hearing with the CRTC. As you may have heard, this hearing resulted in Netflix being ordered to produce specific proprietary information to the CRTC that ultimately in some cases was not provided. Having read the transcripts of this hearing it is clear that Netflix was willing to provide the requested information provided an assurance of confidentiality could be secured from the CRTC. Ultimately an inability to reach an agreement with respect to confidentiality has resulted in this matter still pending. It should also be noted that our Government is on record opposing a Netflix tax, a view similar to what I have heard locally. I will provide a further update on this subject as it becomes available.

On the ISIL terrorist threats to Canadians, we have seen in recent media reports, there has been a number of cases where citizens with a Canadian passport have left Canada to join the terrorist group ISIL. In order to protect Canadians our Government has listed ISIL as an official terrorist group, making it a criminal offence to assist their operations and begun revoking passports of those individuals who leave Canada to join ISIS or other Jihadi terror groups. The leader of the Liberal party has publicly stated his opposition to revoking passports of individuals who join ISIL or other terror organizations, meaning these individuals are free to return to Canada or travel to other destinations under a Canadian passport. As a result this is a subject I would invite further comment on. Is the revoking of passports of individuals who leave Canada to join terror organizations reasonable or should these individuals be free to return to Canada as suggested by the leader of the Liberal party?

In last week's report I discussed in greater detail some aspects of the Reform Act and invited further comments. Many citizens took the time to respond and while some have voiced serious concern and strong opposition to the bill, the majority of citizens I have heard from are supportive for a variety of different reasons. I would also like to credit and recognize individuals who presented unique points that encourage support in areas that I voiced concern over in my report. Based largely on the feedback I have heard from a majority of citizens and pending amendments to the Reform Act I can confirm I will be voting in support of the Bill as it comes up for a vote this week in the House of Commons. The feedback from so many citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla on this bill was very much appreciated.



On the subject of feedback a reminder that I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711

## October 2014

### October 1<sup>st</sup>

It was my intention this week to provide a further update on Canada's current non-combat deployment in Iraq, a subject last referenced in my September 10th report. However at the time of my writing this report there is not yet a significant update to provide. What I can pass on is that should there be a decision to engage in any type of combat- including aerial assault that any combat role involving Canadian forces will be brought before Parliament for a debate and ultimately a vote.

As some will know this was not past practice when the former Government made the decision to engage in Afghanistan, nor is it a requirement or obligation for Government to provide Parliament with an opportunity to vote. Ultimately the commitment to potentially bring this matter before Parliament should a combat aspect be contemplated is a decision by Government to involve our democratically elected members of Parliament to have a voice in what remains a very serious subject. This remains a matter that I believe is of concern to all Canadians and I welcome comments and question in this or any area. While Canada has a long and proud history of standing up for innocent victims against tyranny and oppression, these kind of decisions should never be taken lightly nor for granted.

Another subject that has come up recently is question period in large part because of a questionable exchange last week between a Parliamentary Secretary and the Leader of the Official Opposition. The episode in question led to a subsequent apology from the Parliamentary Secretary in question and a motion this week to potentially change part of how question period works with respect to the ability of the Speaker to engage in interventions during question period. This is a subject that could easily fill many reports however to focus on the positive aftermath there has been a noticeable change in tone on both sides of the House as questions and answers have become far more focussed towards what most would agree is the original purpose of question period. It is also fair to say that this episode has served as a reminder that elected officials are ultimately held to account by the citizens who elect us. If Members of the House engage in the use of profanity or otherwise make comments that demean the House in turn we demean those whom we represent. I believe that all elected officials should be mindful of the need to take responsibility for our own behaviour and conduct ourselves in a manner that honours the good people we represent.

While on the subject of elected officials as the nomination period for candidates in local elections is soon to close I would like to sincerely thank mayors, councillors, regional district directors and school district trustees who are not seeking re-election for their past service. Local Government, as it is often called, is a huge commitment and often a thankless one - overall we enjoy a high quality of life in our region and this is in large part for the ongoing efforts of local government to provide amenities and services that we depend upon. I would also like to welcome those citizens who are putting their name forward to run in the upcoming election to serve. Win or lose having the courage to make a difference is ultimately how we all succeed. Thank you. I can be reached at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

**October 8<sup>th</sup>**

This week in the House of Commons, a majority of Members of Parliament including Government, Independents and one Green MP, voted in support of a Government motion to engage in a six month aerial combat mission against the terrorist group ISIL. As I believe in the significant importance of this motion I have included the full text for your review:

That this House (i) recognise that the leadership of the terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has called on its members to target Canada and Canadians at home and abroad, (ii) further recognise the clear and direct threat that ISIL poses to the people of the region, including members of vulnerable religious and ethnic minority groups who have been subjected to a sustained campaign of brutal sexual violence, murder, and barbaric intimidation by ISIL, (iii) accept that, unless confronted with strong and direct force, the threat ISIL poses to international peace and security, including to Canadian communities, will continue to grow, (iv) affirm Canada's desire, consistent with Canadian values and interests, to protect the vulnerable and innocent civilians of the region, including through urgent humanitarian assistance, (v) acknowledge the request from the Government of Iraq for military support against ISIL from members of the international community, including from the Government of Canada, (vi) further acknowledge the participation of Canada's friends and allies, including numerous countries of the Middle East, in the broad international coalition committed to the fight against ISIL, (vii) note that the United Nations Security Council has become seized of the threat posed by international terrorism with the unanimous passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, and, accordingly: (a) support the Government's decision to contribute Canadian military assets to the fight against ISIL, and terrorists allied with ISIL, including air strike capability for a period of up to six months; (b) note that the Government of Canada will not deploy troops in ground combat operations; and (c) continue to offer its resolute and wholehearted support to the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who stand on guard for all of us.

For the purposes of accountability, I would like to share the reasons why I voted in support of this motion. In early October the United Nations issued a disturbing report that documented some very serious atrocities committed by the group ISIL. More specifically, and I quote from the UN report directly: "gross abuses of human rights perpetrated by ISIL and associated armed groups, including "attacks directly targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, executions and other targeted killings of civilians, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual and physical violence perpetrated against women and children, forced recruitment of children."

This unprecedented level of savage brutality against innocent victims is disturbing but it is also a reality for innocent men, women and children in the region. It should not be overlooked that there have been individuals who have left Canada to join with ISIL in these savage killings- as I mentioned in a former MP report this is why our Government is revoking the passports of these individuals; an act opposed by the leader of the Liberal Party. The question on how best to respond to ISIL is one that has been the subject of much debate this week in Ottawa. The opposition has made it clear they oppose military action against ISIL terrorism and in many cases support increased humanitarian aid or the supply of weapons to local fighting against ISL. Our Government also supports increased humanitarian aid and will increase funding for victims of sexual violence in this region combined with other aid related measures. However we must also recognize that ISIL has demonstrated they will abduct and publicly behead international aid workers demonstrating the serious challenges in administering aid against a terror organization without military support.

As a result the Government of Canada will be joining our allies, including countries such as United States, France, United Kingdom, Denmark and others in doing our part to provide military support

against ISIL. The stated goal of our Canadian support is not to defeat ISIL per se but to diminish their capacity while national and regional Iraqi ground forces in the region become better prepared to deal with this serious threat. We do this not just to alleviate the suffering of others and to restore order; ISIL has made direct threats against Canada and we must negate their ability to train, fund and carry out missions against our country. Of our fleet of 79 CF-18 aircraft, 6 will be deployed including 1 Polaris air-to-air refuelling aircraft and 2 Aurora surveillance aircraft including required pilots and ground personnel to support these aircraft. As mentioned in the motion, this will not be a ground combat mission involving Canada and is subject to review in six months.

The decision to support this mission in my view is supporting long established Canadian values to stand up and protect those who are innocent and most vulnerable from oppression and terror. Canada as a country has always answered the call to stand with our allies in the fight for democracy and for freedom. Turning our back and expecting others to answer the call to serve has never been attributes that define Canada. I appreciate that my views on this subject may not sit well with some citizens and I welcome all views on this matter if you support or oppose our mission against the terror group ISIL. My email is [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or you can reach my office at 1(800) 665-8711. Let us never forget the sacrifices we have made to live in a free and democratic society where we can debate and discuss how we build a better Canada and best help those in need in other countries.

### **October 15<sup>th</sup>**

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday this is a break week from the House of Commons before the House resumes again **on Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup>**, 2014. Also occurring in Ottawa this week is a case that is before the Supreme Court of Canada on assisted suicide. It is unknown at this point if this matter will come before the House of Commons or not in the immediate future however it is a subject that I know many citizens can have strong views on. On related subject that has also arisen is the need for improved access to palliative care in Canada. Currently it is estimated that only 15% of Canadians have access to palliative care and while it is more common in Okanagan-Coquihalla there are many regions in Canada where it is unavailable. The 2013 Economic Action plan budget increased funding to the Pallium Foundation of Canada to increase palliative training for front line health care workers, however more work needs to be done in this area. From the many families I have heard from who have lost a loved one palliative care can make some of life's most challenging times more comfortable. This is a subject I will continue to support increased progress on in Ottawa. Another subject that I remain actively involved with in Ottawa involves Federal regulations with respect to invasive freshwater species such as the Zebra and Quagga mussel. Although the 2014 boating season may be soon coming to an end, the need to have increased regulations in place at the border is of critical importance for the protection of our freshwater lakes and not just here in Okanagan-Coquihalla but across British Columbia. This will be a subject that not unlike my private member's bill, I will continue to pursue until such time these regulations are in effect. My thanks again to the work of the Okanagan Basin Water Board and many citizens who have also taken the time to share concerns on this important subject.

Recently the House of Commons Board of Internal Economy released the 2013-2014 Members Expenditures Report; this is the public document that forms part of my annual accountability report that I will be releasing in an MP report in the near future. As always if you have a comment, question or concern on matter before the House of Commons I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **October 23<sup>rd</sup>**

There may not be words that can convey this week in Ottawa. Having spent close to 10 hours in a hastily secured lock up while emergency responders bravely secured the Parliamentary precinct was an unprecedented experience for all of us. The sound of gunshots, the gunman being killed mere feet away, and later learning of the tragic death of a member of our armed forces while performing his service as an honour guard is more than can be conveyed or reflected upon in the brief space of this column.

On behalf of the citizens of Okanagan-Coquihalla I know our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those armed forces members who were tragically executed over this past week. I would also like to take a moment and thank the many citizens who took the time to express concern during this ordeal- it is an experience that I believe all Canadians will not forget.

It has been suggested that the day in question will forever change Canada. I submit it cannot and should not. In the weeks and months ahead while we learn more about this week we must never forget what we know about ourselves. As Canadians we have always stood bravely to fight for freedom, for democracy and against those who would do us harm. We welcome and embrace our vastness and our uniqueness. We may at times disagree however our way is to do so respectfully and peacefully. It is our diversity that has united us as Canadians in values that we share that make us proud. Our Canada is one that will always be united and as Canadians we will stand together to defend those principles that have long helped to build our country.

On Thursday the House of Commons resumed and the democratic debate and discussion that will fill the halls serves as a reminder that Canada cannot and will not be intimidated by senseless and disturbing acts of brutal violence. It is understandable that changes will occur on Parliament Hill however from my own standpoint we must ensure that our democratic institutions remain in operation and that they are always accessible to Canadians who are served by them. It is also important that we remain open minded and continue to learn from this week's events and take whatever measures are necessary to protect citizens from harm, whether they be Parliamentarians, security forces, public servants or citizens.

As I write this week's report, our House ceremonies have just re-opened with a well- deserved tribute to the bravery of our Sergeant-At-Arms Kevin Vickers, who alongside his team courageously defended the House of Commons from an armed assault. After the ceremony our Prime Minister, along with the leaders of the opposition expressed unity as we move forward to ensure our democratic process stands above the threats of violence and terror. Collectively Members of Parliament represent Canadians and as much as we often agree to disagree in this place the unity among the House on this day was a reminder that Canada is a united country that will always stand together in the fight for freedom, for democracy and the rule of law.

I welcome your comments and questions and can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

## **October 29<sup>th</sup>**

It has been just over one week since the tragic events in Ottawa and Quebec occurred that have given us all pause to reflect, mourn and in many cases share personal feelings on these disturbing events. In turn I have also received a large amount of feedback from citizens on a variety of

issues. Some of the issues I have heard from citizens on range from not repairing the bullet damage within the House of Commons for historical perspective, to ensuring that honor guard is armed and in some cases increased. Feedback I have also heard is for security to be increased within the House of Commons but generally not to the extent that Parliament Hill is off limits and inaccessible to Canadians. While many citizens have expressed an understanding for changes to occur most are also concerned that changes are measured and carefully implemented. The need to achieve a balance and not significantly compromise rights and freedoms of Canadians is another concern I have heard from many citizens. Lastly, I continue to receive supportive messages and well wishes from constituents that have been greatly appreciated throughout this ordeal. I am listening to these concerns carefully and ensuring that they are passed on in Ottawa.

One Bill that has been introduced this week is Bill C-44 "Protection of Canada from Terrorists Act". It should be noted this Bill was not drafted in response to last week's events; in fact the Bill was due to be tabled into the House of Commons on the very day the shooting occurred and as a result was delayed until this week. Ultimately Bill C-44 seeks to modernize Canada's ability to collect foreign intelligence and investigate threats including the ability to provide security assessments. In order to achieve these objectives Bill C-44 proposes a number of measures that in large part will increase the investigative tools available to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). Some of these measures include confirming the Federal Court can issue warrants for CSIS to investigate threats to our national security outside of Canada. Another measure is providing the Federal Court with "the authority to operate within the scope of relevant Canadian law when issuing warrants to authorize CSIS to undertake certain activities to investigate a threat to the security of Canada outside of Canada". It is also proposed to protect the identity of CSIS sources from disclosure in a similar manner as would be afforded to informants to Canadian law enforcement agencies. This same protection would also apply to employees of CSIS. Although there was some speculation and concern raised that the identity provisions would be exempt from judicial oversight, the legislation does contain language that ensures judicial oversight is respected in this act. In more plain language this means that provisions within this act ensure a Judge ultimately has jurisdiction over identity protection.

Bill C-44 also proposes amendments to the "Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act" that will, and I quote directly "will enable the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to revoke Canadian citizenship from dual citizens who are convicted of terrorism, high treason, and treason or spying offences, depending on the sentence received." Although many citizens I have heard from are supportive of individuals with dual citizenship having Canadian citizenship revoked in the event they engage in acts of terrorism there are others who disagree with such measures. As always I welcome your comments, questions and concern on this or any Bill before the House of Commons.

Before I close this week I would like to sincerely thank the many citizens who have taken the time over the past week to share your concerns, thoughts and feelings. In times of great tragedy and loss, the ability of Canadians to come together and collectively mourn while standing proud for our values and what we stand for as a country has helped many through what is a difficult time. Last week I expressed my concern that we do not allow events such as these to change Canada. After the past week I have been reminded that brutal acts of senseless violence will never change who we are as Canadians. That is what sets us apart and is what we collectively celebrate together on the 1st day of July for over 147 years.

## November 2014

### November 5<sup>th</sup>

One thing all political parties agree on in Ottawa is the need to provide more support for Canadian families to help offset the considerable costs of raising children. Where there is disagreement is on what is the most effective means on how to achieve this goal that is also further compounded by the fact that Canadian is a very vast and diverse country and what programs may be of benefit to some families may not be of benefit to others.

As an example, recently the NDP (if elected as Government) announced a future program for a nationally subsidized daycare program. Providing subsidized day care would be more of a benefit for families in large and moderately sized cities than it would be for remote rural families where no daycare services might be available. Furthermore, for families with a single parent who is either unemployed or unable to work because of disability, subsidized daycare is of no benefit whatsoever. Likewise for families who do not require childcare because of grandparents, extended family, friends or a stay at home spouse they would also not benefit from a subsidized daycare plan. I raise these issues not to criticize the NDP but rather to point out the challenges of any one size fits all Ottawa imposed program that may not meet the diverse needs of Canadian families.

Last week, our Government also announced a range of measures to help assist Canadian families that also in some cases will of more benefit to some families than others. The first announced measure I will discuss is the opportunity for families to pay less tax to Government through income splitting. What this means is if one spouse earns significantly more money than the other spouse they can transfer a portion of the higher income to the spouse with the lower income in order for the higher income spouse to end up in a lower tax bracket and pay less in tax. The maximum amount of tax that can be saved by income splitting has been capped at \$2,000 to ensure that upper income earners do not excessively benefit from this program that also creates tax fairness. How does income splitting create tax fairness? Currently if both spouses each earn \$40,000 for a combined household income of \$80,000 the amount of federal income tax for each spouse is 15%. However if another household also with an \$80,000 total income has one spouse earning \$60,000 and the other spouse earning \$20,000 that would result in one spouse paying 22% in income taxes compared to 15% for the lower income spouse. In spite of having the same \$80,000 household income one family ends up paying more tax than the other family thus creating unfair tax policy. In this example the spouse with the higher income could transfer part of that income to the lower income spouse in order to be in a lower tax bracket and pay less in tax similar to what other families would pay with the same household income.

Some have suggested that the tax fairness achieved by income splitting only benefits wealthy families. This is also largely false and I will provide an example to illustrate why. In an affluent household where both spouses earn in excess of \$150,000 (or more) each spouse is already in a top tax bracket and thus there is no excess income to transfer from one spouse to the other spouse to take advantage of a lower tax bracket. That is not to suggest income splitting works for all families. For example an extremely low income family that is below the income earnings threshold and is not currently paying income tax obviously would not benefit from paying less tax when they are not currently paying income tax. Likewise for a single parent with no spouse to split income with there is also no tax benefit to income splitting. It is for these reasons that our Government also announced a significant increase to the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) that is payable to all qualifying families including low income and single parents.

The announced increase to the UCCB will be a 60% increase to parents for each child up to 6 years of age increasing the current monthly payment of \$100 to \$160. The UCCB will also be significantly expanded- for the first time ever the UCCB will also provide direct support of \$ 60 per month for each child between the ages of 6-17. Collectively the increased UCCB will provide increased direct benefits to roughly four million Canadian families. It should also be made clear that the existing child care benefit for low income families is also being fully maintained. Aside from income splitting and increased UCCB the Government also announced an increase to the child care expense deduction to \$8000 per child up to 7 years of age and \$5000 for children aged 7-16. These changes will apply in the 2015 taxation year. The Children Fitness Tax Credit will also be doubled to \$1000 in the 2015 taxation year and allocated as a refundable tax credit to ensure low income families can benefit from this credit.

### **November 10<sup>th</sup>**

On this week, in what is the 11th month, on the eleventh day and at the eleventh hour Canadians will give pause to honour and reflect on the sacrifice of those brave soldiers who have served and continue to serve Canada. Over the past weeks Canada has again collectively grieved at the loss of life from soldiers in uniform who were targeted because of their commitment to serve Canada. As a country we will never forget these sacrifices and our thoughts and prayers are with the friends and families of these fallen members of our armed forces.

We must also not forget that these soldiers served to fight for democracy and for freedom. They serve to protect the innocent from those who would do them harm. These are Canadian values and what have built a stronger, greater Canada. Part of our national anthem is our commitment that as Canadians we stand and on guard with glowing hearts for our true north that is strong and free. On this Remembrance Day when we sing these words that define who we are as a country let us never forget these are freedoms that were fought for by brave man & women who continue to stand on guard to this very day.

I would also like to remind the citizens of Okanagan Coquihalla that in addition to our armed forces many brave Canadians also volunteer to serve. Canadian doctors and medical care workers, journalists, teachers, aid workers and others have bravely volunteered to help those most in need in regions that are besieged by conflict. Increasingly these individuals have also been targeted by violent and oppressive forces who continue to engage in senseless violence.

On this Remembrance Day let us remember, let us honour and let us give thanks for all of those who made the commitment to serve.

I will be traveling throughout Okanagan-Coquihalla on Tuesday however for the duration of the week as the House of Commons is not sitting I am available to meet and hear your concerns first hand. I can be reached at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

### **November 19<sup>th</sup>**

As a result of previous positive feedback on what were my first and second accountability reports, I have made the commitment to submit annually to the citizens of Okanagan-Coquihalla a summary of fiscal expenditures over the past year. As in previous reports I will follow the format using information from the most recent fiscal period of April 1st of 2013 up to March 31st of 2014 in accordance with the Board of Internal Economy reporting periods. While some of this information is

publicly available, it can be difficult to find and often exists at several different locations online or not at all. As stated previously, I believe it is important for citizens to have an annual summary on the activities of elected officials in public office including the related costs.

Office expenses and travel are typically the most scrutinized areas of spending for elected officials at any level of government. For Members of Parliament from British Columbia, our travel expenses are higher than those of MP's from other areas in Canada as a result of the fact that we fly the farthest distances between B.C. and Ottawa. My personal travel expense during this time frame was just over \$ 49,000; this is down slightly from \$55,000 that was spent in last year's fiscal period. In my case this works out to roughly 420 hours in an airplane and I would estimate over 95% was regular coach class- I didn't fly first class before being elected as an MP and I continue to make every effort to fly economy class where possible as an MP.

Total spending for my two offices here in Okanagan-Coquihalla and one in Ottawa including all staff, leases, advertising and the above mentioned travel was just over \$355,746. This is also a decrease from the \$394,289 that was spent in last year's fiscal period. This amount is within the top three lowest expenses for a BC based MP. As a comparison closer to home, NDP MP Alex Atamanenko from B.C. Southern Interior has posted spending of \$444,152 as a comparison.

Sponsored travel falls into a different category as Members of Parliament are invited from time to time to travel to other destinations both within and outside of Canada for a variety of different reasons. These invitations often include airfare and accommodations being paid for by the host and not taxpayers. When Members of Parliament accept these special trips they are required to disclose and report such travel to The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. I can confirm that while I did receive invitations of this nature I did not accept any complimentary trips or travel during the last fiscal period nor have I accepted any since being elected.

One other change I made during this past year is with my email. All MPs are given two email addresses, one that is public and the other that is private. This past year I had my private MP email account deleted. I now only have one MP email account [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) -this way when you send an email my way it is my one and only email account and you can be reassured I will be receiving and reading your email.

The information included in this week's report is intended to provide a brief summary of some of the more commonly scrutinized expenses. If there is other information that you are interested in, please do not hesitate to contact me with your request. I can be reached via email at [dan.albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:dan.albas@parl.gc.ca) or at 1-800-665-8711.

## **November 26<sup>th</sup>**

There have been a number of items occurring in Ottawa this week that are deserving of mention. Most important I believe is a report from Canada's Auditor General Michael Ferguson describing challenges that some veterans encounter in obtaining mental health services & benefits. I believe all Canadians agree strongly that lengthy delays for veterans services and benefits are unacceptable and more so in an important area such as mental health. While it is true that Canada currently has 415 full time mental workers and a ratio of soldiers to mental health support professionals that is one of the highest in NATO these services are of limited value if they cannot be readily accessible by those who need them.

One of the challenges in providing specialized government services is ensuring that the services are provided to those intended to receive them. Recently many citizens in Ottawa were shocked and



disturbed to discover an individual who is not a member of our armed forces wearing a decorated uniform on Remembrance Day. The end result of this unfortunate incitement has resulted in death threats and an official police investigation. While it is obviously important to have a process that can identify veterans in need of services from those who have not served, we must also ensure this process is timely and can be navigated easily by veterans and their family members. From all accounts this is a process that needs improvement and I am certain I speak on behalf of all citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla in supporting further measures that simplify and expedite this process.

Also occurring in Ottawa this week is the ongoing fallout over two members of the Liberal caucus being suspended for alleged personal misconduct involving two unidentified members of the NDP caucus. Although I have been asked about this particular issue it is generally my rule not to comment on the actions of others within and outside the House of Commons. This issue has been the focus of many in Ottawa media circles and in my view that can take away from other items of importance also occurring on Parliament Hill. I do believe it is important to send a strong message that violence of any kind against women is unacceptable and the past few weeks in Ottawa should serve as a reminder of the need for respectful relations within and outside of the workplace and always erring on the side of caution.

Also occurring in Ottawa this week is debate on Government Bills **C-42** Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act and Bill **C-18**- Agricultural Growth Act. There is also a number of Private Members Bills such as Bill **C-583**- An Act to amend the Criminal Code (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder) Bill **C-585**- An Act to Amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (Period of Residence) and Bill **C-574**- An Act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act (use of wood) For further information on these or any Bill before the House of Commons please do not hesitate to contact me.

Before I close this week I would like to acknowledge and thank the many municipal leaders who participated in their final council, regional district or school board meeting. Your past service to your community is appreciated and it has been a pleasure to work with many of you over the past few years. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to those newly elected and re-elected for what will be a first ever 4 year term. I am currently in the process of working with local MLAs and Mayors to organize a series of elected officials forums where citizens can meet your elected representatives in a casual format to exchange ideas and discuss items of concern firsthand. The first of these will be held this Saturday in Penticton between 10 am and noon at the Penticton Trade & Convention Center. No reservations are required and I hope to see many citizens take the time to stop in for a coffee to say hello. For more information I can be reached at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

## **December 2014**

### **December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

This week is another busy one in Ottawa with large a number of Bills up for debate or votes as well as a motion from the NDP. Thalidomide was a drug briefly approved by Health Canada in 1961 that was intended to provide relief from nausea and other morning sickness related symptoms among pregnant women. Unfortunately this drug turned out to have very catastrophic consequences- even death. For those surviving babies some commonly occurring birth defects include deafness, blindness,

disfigurement, cleft palate, and many other internal disabilities. Today there are fewer than 100 survivors in Canada.

The NDP motions on Thalidomide read as follows:

*“That, in the opinion of the House: (a) full support should be offered to survivors of Thalidomide; (b) the urgent need to defend the rights and dignity of those affected by Thalidomide should be recognized; and (c) the government should provide support to survivors, as requested by the Thalidomide Survivors Taskforce.”*

This was a motion that I supported and in fact was supported by all Members of Parliament that will ensure survivors of Thalidomide are provided much needed supports for the challenges they face on a daily basis.

Also occurring this week is continued debate on Bill C-43 The Economic Action Plan budget bill for 2014 and a number of private members bills including Bill C-628— An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and the National Energy Board Act (oil transportation and pipeline certificate) Bill and Bill C-524 — An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (election advertising) there will also be a private bill from the Senate Bill S-213— An Act respecting Lincoln Alexander Day.

On a local note I would like to thank the citizens who came out for our Penticton Elected officials forum. This was a worthwhile venue and I appreciated the opportunity to hear concerns and also to meet some of our newly elected members of council. I am currently in the process of organizing more of these events in other parts of Okanagan-Coquihalla. As next week will be the final week in Ottawa before the house breaks for the holidays I will soon be back in the riding and available for meetings. To arrange an appointment or to pass on other comments or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

## **December 10<sup>th</sup>**

Late last week I had the pleasure of sending out a news release – for those of you who may have missed it here is the opening few paragraphs:

“Okanagan-Coquihalla MP Dan Albas welcomes new regulations to better protect BC freshwater lakes from invasive species.

Today Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Gail Shea announced new proposed Invasive Species Regulations that create new regulatory tools that will help to prevent the spread of invasive species such as freshwater zebra and quagga mussels. The new regulations will create importation prohibitions at the border including other provisions relating to control and eradication.”

As I pointed out in the news release these new regulations are an important first step to better protect BC freshwater lakes from invasive species. We know here in southern BC that lakes such as Osoyoos, Okanagan and the Shuswap are very popular with destination boaters. We also know that there are now several lakes south of the border that are infested with invasive species such as freshwater mussels. Having regulations in place at the border is a critical first step towards prevention. In the event a major lake has been infested the potential to spread to other nearby lakes is significantly increased; with so many pristine freshwater lakes in British Columbia this is a matter that could have a serious impact on British Columbia. Although this announcement is encouraging other measures will also be required and this will be an issue I will continue to work on.

Another recent announcement is from Government is the recent introduction of the Price Transparency Act. This Act proposes new regulatory powers for the Commissioner of Competition to investigate situations where retail practices result in pricing being significantly higher for an the same item sold in Canada compared to a lower price in the United States. Unequal pricing, often referred to as geographic price discrimination, can result in Canadian consumers facing significantly higher prices for similar goods than what can be purchased from across the border. There are other factors that can influence price that can include tariffs, transportation costs, variable exchange rate, market size and insufficient competition. The Price Transparency Act will allow the Commissioner of Competition an expanded mandate to investigate all of these factors to determine why a differential in pricing exists and what remedies may be available. It is estimated that Canadians frequently pay prices that are between 10% to 25% higher for goods in Canada compared to the United States. The intent of the Price Transparency Act is to help lower these price differentials and extend the purchasing power for Canadian consumers. For further information on this or any Bill before the House of Commons please do not hesitate to contact me at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or via phone at 1-800-665-8711.

Before I close I would like to extend an invitation to West Kelowna and area residents to attend an elected officials meet and greet with the newly elected Mayor & Council of West Kelowna this Saturday, December 13, 2014 at the OK Regional Library Westbank branch located at #31 – 2484 Main Street in West Kelowna from 10:30 AM- 12:30 PM.

## **December 17<sup>th</sup>**

Last Friday was the last sitting day of 2014 for the House of Commons as the House breaks for the holiday and allows Members of Parliament time to be back in home ridings before the session resumes in January of 2015. However as is often the case while the House of Commons rises the Canadian Senate continues to sit for a number of additional days and on Tuesday evening of this week nine Bills became law as Royal Assent was received on Bills C-45, S-211, S-5, C-483, C-442, C-428, C-43, C-525 and C-266.

What are these new laws? Bill C-45 is a Government Bill and in this instance is an Appropriations Act. Bill S-5 is a Senate Bill – An Act to amend the Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve Act. Bill C-43 is a Government Bill and also the Governments Economic Action Plan budget for 2014.

A number of Private Members Bills also received Royal Assent. Bill C-483 “An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act”. This act is an administrative one that transfers the authority to authorize a temporary escorted absence of a criminal convicted of first and second degree murder (within three years of full parole eligibility) to the Parole Board of Canada as opposed to a prison warden as is the current situation. Proponents of this Bill have suggested there is greater accountability to victims when the Parole Board of Canada is the authorizing authority in these types of situations.

Bill S-211 is “The National Health and Fitness Day Act” sponsored by BC Senator Nancy Greene-Raine; it is a Private Member’s bill first tabled in the Senate that designates the first Saturday in June as a day to promote increased participation in fitness and sports activities.

Bill C-442 was sponsored by BC MP and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May and is the “Federal Framework on Lyme Disease Act” – this is a Bill I voted in support of and also heard strong support from a number of constituents across Okanagan-Coquihalla. Bill C-428 is the Indian Act Amendment and Replacement Act– and is the first private members bill passed by a First Nations MP in the

history of the House of Commons. I voted in support of this Bill and wrote about it in my December 30th MP report of last year.

The final two bills passed this week were both private members bill as well. Bill C-525 is the Employees' Voting Rights Act that provides for a democratic private ballot in matters of unionization and de-certification under federal jurisdiction. Finally Bill C-266, the "Pope John Paul II Day Act" designates that April 2 of each year be recognized as "Pope John Paul II Day" – this Bill does not propose that April 2nd would be a holiday rather a day to recognize some of the achievements of Pope John Paul II in promoting freedom and human rights.

Some of these Bill were strongly supported by all sides of the House of Commons while others were only supported by a small majority of votes. From my perspective while it is often disagreement that most defines the House of Commons the fact that a First Nations MP and also the leader of the Green Party with a caucus of just two Members of Parliament have introduced private members bills that have become law is evidence of the fact that diversity and debate remain healthy and vibrant in our Canadian Parliament. At times there will always be disagreement but across party lines there can also be consensus as Members of Parliament do work together in support on common areas of concern.

While it is often common to focus on the challenges and conflicts it should not be forgotten that collectively over the years our Parliamentary democracy, in spite of the many flaws and shortcomings has consistently helped to create the great country of Canada. It has been a privilege to represent the good people of Okanagan-Coquihalla over this past session that has also been a very productive one. As always I welcome your comments, questions and concerns on matters before the House of Commons. I can be reached at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

## **December 24<sup>th</sup>**

One aspect that I enjoy most as a Member of Parliament is the great diversity of citizens and commentary that I hear throughout Okanagan-Coquihalla on an ongoing basis. One year ago I reflected on concerns I heard over the loss of both the Kamloops News and Merritt News; these concerns were not just local but in many cases national. As much as we live in an age of information citizens greatly value local media and the relationships they form with our communities.

Although we may not always agree with local editorial opinion it is important that we always respect free speech and the diversity of different points of view. As my weekly reports are often communicated to citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla through our local media I would like to take a moment to pass on my appreciation and thanks to those who work in community news publications be it in print, online or on air. Informed commentary from professional news organizations is a service that I believe we should not take for granted.

When looking back on this past year I would be remiss if I did not also mention that amount of new Mayors, councillors and regional district directors elected back in November. I have been in the process of working with local government to organize a number of elected officials forums so that members of the public can meet new representatives and also so that newly elected officials from different levels of government can meet each other. Although spats and disagreements between levels of government can make for great headlines it is also important that governments have the ability to work together in partnership to ensure infrastructure projects, services and other programs are carried out in an effective manner that is respectful to taxpayers. In Okanagan-Coquihalla we have a long standing history of successful partnership between the local, provincial and federal

governments and based on the newly elected and re-elected officials I have met to date I believe this positive trend will continue.

This past year has also not been without tragedy. The disturbing deaths of two Canadian forces soldiers who were brutally executed combined with the shooting on Parliament Hill are all events that will forever be in the memory of Canadians. However in the days and weeks after these horrific events we also witnessed not just a united Parliament, but more importantly, a united Canada. Although our freedoms were attacked Canadians, responded with compassion, kindness and a resolve to continue to stand against tyranny for our values. While changes have been made around the House of Commons and Parliament Hill, the principle of accessibility has not been compromised. Each day Canadians come from far and wide to experience Parliament first hand through tours and walking through the precinct. It was once pointed out to me that our Canadian Parliament was one of the very few in the world that is openly accessible to Canadians and is not fenced off where it can only be viewed but never experienced. These things are all part of what makes us Canadian and why on this Christmas I hope that every citizen gives thanks for family, friends, neighbours and our fellow citizens who collectively are the fabric of our great country. As the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla I would like to sincerely wish all citizens a Merry Christmas and enjoyable holiday season. As always I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

## **December 31<sup>st</sup>**

It is sometimes said that in public office the challenges are many and the victories small. As elected representatives in Parliament, we often have the tendency to focus on how much or how little is spent across the vast areas of service and infrastructure that is provided to citizens.

However sometimes we must also take a moment to look at how services are being delivered to citizens and if common sense is being applied or can further improvements be made? I raise these questions as there are circumstances that occur from time to time where I believe government could better serve citizens and I would like to provide an example on that point to better illustrate.

Most citizens will work a variety of different jobs, spanning a career until retirement. Over many decades citizens will typically file tax returns annually with Revenue Canada as well as making contributions to EI and CPP. Imagine, upon retirement and applying for OAS to be told you must first prove you have been residing in Canada to qualify. Obviously there are rules in place to prevent newly arrived citizens who have not been paying into the system through their taxes from collecting but for someone who has paid for many decades this can be a serious point of frustration. In some circumstances some Canadians applying may have spent time out of the country for parts of their working years. More so, the reasons that can trigger these situations may be decades out of date. For many citizens to have diligently paid taxes over many decades to discover that Government may not use such records can be a very emotionally challenging experience. Further complicating this situation is the fact that most citizens do not retain previously filed income tax information from a decade or more back in history nor do they keep expired Passports or other out -of-date documents.

Fortunately this kind of situation does not occur frequently, but during my relatively brief time as a Member of Parliament I have encountered this problem enough that in my view, it is a concern. Why does this happen? There are a variety of factors but the ultimate reason is that although citizens typically think of the Federal Government as a single agency in reality Government is made up of different departments, agencies and other organizations that in the vast majority of instances do not share your personal information between them as they have obligations not to do so, under various laws like the Privacy Act as a chief example. Finding resolutions to the situations I have

mentioned above often requires obtaining information separately from different agencies of Government so that information can, in turn, be shared with another agency to ensure in this case that OAS benefits are paid. This process can be time consuming and create hardship for someone in need. Many citizens in this situation have also pointed to the frustration of one agency of government not being aware of the information contained by other agencies. In summary this process as it currently works can be improved.

Increased information sharing between different agencies of Government is potentially the most efficient means to avoid situations such as this one from occurring and also to improve government services to citizens. However, there are also those who oppose any increased sharing of information between different agencies of government for reasons of personal privacy.

The intent of my MP report this week is not to promote or oppose increased information sharing by government agencies but rather to ask citizens your views on this subject. Is increased information sharing between different agencies of government something you support or something you are more likely to oppose? I welcome your input on this or any matter before the House of Commons. I can be reached via email at [Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca) or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711). As 2014 is soon to come to a close I would like to sincerely wish all residents of Okanagan-Coquihalla a safe and enjoyable New Year's celebration along with a prosperous 2015.