

January 2015

January 7th

This week Canadians were shocked and saddened to learn of the brutal and senseless killing of twelve French citizens in a terrorist attack. Of the twelve victims, ten were journalists and two were police officers. Freedom of the press and as well as law and order are two cherished aspects of any just and democratic society. It has been suggested that these murders were planned well in advance and in retaliation to satirical cartoons involving Islam. In turn a debate has ensued from the decision by some media organizations, including the CBC, to refuse to show some of these cartoons to Canadians, out of concern they may be offensive to some.

Since this incident occurred I have heard a large outpour of various comments and concerns from citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla and elsewhere including some suggested courses of action for Government. I would like to respond to some of the most commonly raised areas of concern.

The subject of the cartoons in question potentially being censored is also a concern I share. Canada, including the CBC, has long had a tradition of satire. Well known CBC shows such as the Rick Mercer Report, This Hour Has 22 Minutes, the Royal Canadian Air Farce and others have long used satire to poke comedic fun at many aspects of Canadian life, culture and our identity. It is in my view concerning if our national broadcaster arbitrarily decides that some faiths can be subject to comedic interpretation, whereas others are exempt or otherwise deemed to be "off limits". It can, in effect create division and runs contrary to many of the values we hold dear, which leads to the second and larger point.

We must never forget our successes as a country, that we have built a united and inclusive Canada. Immigration and integration has long been the foundation that has helped to build Canada and while we respect and share great diversity and many different cultures we also have our own unique identity as Canadians. Those who seek to do us harm threaten our unity. Division and exclusion are the weapons of those radicalized in extremist movements, who seek to separate civilized and democratic societies from the values they cherish to instead instil fear and create controls that limit freedom. Freedom, equality and democracy are the greatest threats to extremists and radicalized movements who fear these principles to such an extent they will brutally execute un-armed reporters, aid workers and those who are most vulnerable including women and children. Canada has always stood against tyranny and to protect the rights and freedoms of those who are most vulnerable. I believe these principles are part of what it means to be Canadian. Throughout our history and to this very day we do not turn our back and expect others to make these sacrifices.

There will be those who will disagree with my comments this week as should be expected in any open, free democratic society. This week more than any other, we should embrace our right to disagree and to debate without fear of reprisal or repercussion. However let us also never forget that what makes us stronger as a country is our ability to stand together united as Canadians. The darkest moments of our past have always been when segments of our society have been isolated and excluded from others. A situation that still exists in some countries to this day and can lead to further conflict. We are a nation united and as Canadians we will stand together in our shared freedoms and

democracy while we continue to build a stronger Canada. I welcome your comments and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

January 14th

In just over one week the House of Commons will again be in session for the first time in 2015. As 2015 is also an election year, this will be the final sitting of the 41st session of Parliament. As is customary at the end of a year, there have been a number of year end reviews on Parliament, covering a wide range of topics from a variety of media organizations. Most recently the subject of MP voting attendance records was reported on by the Ottawa Citizen. Attendance in the House of Commons is an interesting subject for MPs. It may come as a surprise to some that the House of Commons does not formally report MP attendance records. In fact, within the House it is actually considered unparliamentary to point out or otherwise mention the absence of another MP. As described by the House of Commons Procedure and Practice manual: "Allusions to the presence or absence of a Member or Minister in the Chamber are unacceptable."

This raises the question on how best can citizens keep track of their Member of Parliament's voting attendance in the House of Commons? One such way is by recorded votes in the House. Surprisingly there is no readily available information of this type from the Parliamentary precinct. In the past an independent website known as "How'd They Vote" would provide helpful information to citizens of this nature however as I observed back in 2012, this website is no longer active. Fortunately two journalists from the Ottawa Citizen did take the time to cover the topic of MP voting records to determine attendance. The results were quite surprising. The good news is that there were five MP's with perfect one hundred percent voting records and a further sixteen MPs who were all above ninety nine percent. To achieve a 100% vote attendance record meant that an MP would have voted 269 times in 2014. I am proud to be among the five Members of Parliament to achieve a 100% voting record on behalf of the citizens of Okanagan-Coquihalla.

On the other hand, the ten Members of Parliament with the worst attendance records were all less than 50%- meaning they missed more votes than they attended. The worst record belongs to an MP who voted only 16 times out of the possible 269 votes. One other trend that emerged in the analysis from the Ottawa Citizen is that a proportionately large number of these MPs missing votes most often were independents with no party affiliation. Although political parties are often not portrayed positively the party whip system of ensuring MPs are in the House of Commons to attend votes does on the surface appear to have more success in this area.

It should also be pointed out that there are many valid reasons as to why a Member of Parliament may be away from the House of Commons and miss votes as a result. Parliamentary business and committee work, Ministerial responsibilities, important events in an MP's home riding, illness or family emergencies are some of the many reasons that account for the diversity of voting records. Members of Parliament are also required to fill out monthly attendance records with the House of Commons that is submitted internally. In my view I believe that vote attendance could be better reported in a more user friendly format so that media or others are not required to take on a project of individually compiling each Member of Parliament's vote record in order to ascertain attendance; more so when not all sitting days in the House of Commons have votes. Some days there may be many votes whereas other days may have none.

As always I welcome your comments and questions on this or any subject before the House of Commons. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

January 21st

Next week the House of Common will be back in session as the spring sitting will be underway on Monday, January 26th. Currently the House of Commons is scheduled to sit from January 26th until the end of June with a few break weeks scattered throughout. Normally after the end of June the House would rise and resume in late September– given that this is an election year it is unexpected that the House will sit after June unless a matter arises that results in the Parliament being recalled, a rare occurrence.

As this is the final year for the 41st Parliament it also means the end of what many have called “gold plated” MP Pensions. When I was first elected in 2011 concerns about the MP Pension plan were among some of the topics frequently raised by citizens and in turn I was one of the first Members of Parliament in Ottawa to publicly support changes to the MP Pension plan that were more respectful to taxpayers. Ultimately our Government did make changes that will become implemented for those MP's elected into what will become the 42nd Parliament. The changes to the MP Pension plan will see a Member of Parliament pension contributions move towards equal 50/50 cost sharing, a change that is also being implemented to the federal public service pensions. I also discovered that some citizens believe a retired Member of Parliament who has qualified for an MP Pension can immediately begin collecting pension benefits upon retirement from Parliament. Under the current rules a qualifying MP cannot begin to collect a pension until they turn 55 although this is also being phased out and newly elected MPs, much like newly hired federal public service workers, will have a new retirement age set at 65. These combined changes to the MP pension plan and the federal public sector pension plan are estimated to save taxpayers \$2.6 billion over the next five years.

One other possible change to MP pensions is courtesy of a private members bill from my Conservative colleague MP John Williamson. In the past some Members of Parliament, including Senators, have been convicted of serious criminal acts. Many Canadians have found it offensive when a convicted criminal who was formerly an MP or Senator can continue to collect generous pension payments on behalf of Canadian taxpayers. Worse, there is currently a loophole where an MP or Senator who is facing criminal charges can retire or resigns prior to being convicted so they can be fully entitled to a full Parliamentary pension including benefits for life. Private Members Bill C-518 proposes a mechanism that Members of Parliament and Senators convicted of serious crimes would no longer be entitled to collect a generous taxpayer provided Parliamentary pension and related benefits. This bill is supported by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and to date all citizens in Okanagan Coquihalla that I have heard from on this subject. I have previously spoken in support of this Bill in the House of Commons and intend to do so again as this bill returns for debate next week.

I mention changes to both the gold plated MP pension plan and the federal public sector pension plan for a reason. As many citizens will know our Government recently announced increasing the universal child tax benefit and also extending it to children over six years old that will ensure all families working or not will receive more support. Our Government has also proposed tax fairness for families– and to be clear these changes can result in families sending less of their household income

to Ottawa. Often those in opposition suggest that Ottawa cannot afford for families to pay less tax back to Ottawa. What is seldom pointed out is that families paying \$2.6 billion less over 5 years towards MP and public sector pensions means that some of that money can in fact be returned to Canadian families. As I have mentioned previously we are fortunate in a democracy that the subject of taxes and paying more or less of your money to Ottawa is one of many subjects that is part of healthy democratic discussion and debate. As always I welcome your views on this or any subject before the House, I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

January 28th

Before I begin this week's report I would like to thank the many citizens who respond each week and in particular for the overwhelming response I received from last week's report on changes to the MP pension plan. One question that a number of citizens raised is what does the MP pension plan moving to a 50/50 cost sharing relationship mean in actual dollars. The answer to this question can vary on account of a number of variables that like most pensions include the overall length of time served, the amount of income an MP earns averaged over a 5 year period, having served for a minimum of 6 years to be eligible for a pension and finally an MP lifespan once being eligible to collect a pension.

In order to provide more context on this question I will provide an example: under the current pension plan, a MP who retires with 9 years of service will be entitled to receive an annual pension of \$46,036 per year once they reach retirement age. In order to qualify for that pension, the MP would have contributed roughly \$11,665 dollars per year over the nine years for a total paid of just under \$105,000. Taxpayers on the other hand would have contributed roughly \$68,641 each year over the nine years for a total paid in excess of over \$ 617,000. Easy to understand why these pensions have been referred to as "gold plated" since they were introduced in the 1950's by the Liberal Government of the day.

How does this compare to the revised pension plan with 50/50 cost sharing? As many have asked about my own MP pension I can state that I do not qualify for an MP pension, however for sake of example if an MP served for 9 years under the revised MP pension plan upon retiring they could expect an annual pension of roughly \$39,398. Under the revised system instead of paying \$11,665 per year the revised amount would be roughly \$39,000 per year. Over a 9 year term this amounts to just over \$350,000 split equally with taxpayers as opposed to the over \$617,000 paid for by taxpayers under the current MP pension plan. While both pension plans are very generous, it is easy to see how 50/50 cost sharing on MP pension plans and in the federal public service pension plan will save taxpayers \$2.6 billion over the next 5 years.

Moving forward to this week, debate in Parliament continued on Bill C-518, the private members bill that is summarized by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as a bill to "revoke the taxpayer-funded pension of MPs and Senators convicted of serious crimes against taxpayers"- to confirm I spoke in support of this Bill and will continue to support bill C-518. Another Bill that I have spoken in support of that is in the House this week is Bill C-21, the "Red Tape Reduction Act" that I have heard strong support for from small business owners in Okanagan-Coquihalla. Bill C-44 "The Protection of Canada from Terrorists Act" is also before the House this week. This is a bill I referenced in my October 29th MP report for those looking for further information. Aside from Bill C-518 other private members business in the House includes Bill C-626 "An Act to amend the Statistics Act" and

motion M-534 “Child poverty” along with debate on these Bills will also be a number of votes and Parliamentary committee work is also actively underway.

As always 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 or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

February 2015

February 6th

On Friday of last week, the Federal Government introduced Bill C-51- “The Anti-Terrorism Act”. This is a bill that proposes a number of changes to enhance the abilities of our security agencies to better protect Canadians against terrorists and acts of terrorism. There are eight key measures proposed in this bill.

The first measure is to increase the mandate of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to include the ability to disrupt potential threats to Canadians when there are believed to be reasonable grounds to do so. In the event that disrupting a potential terrorist act may be in contravention to the Charter or of other Canadian laws, a court order issued by a Judge would be required to authorize such actions. CSIS will also have the ability to issue a temporary threat disruption order that is intended to be limited to a maximum of 120 days. The intent of this provision is to prevent individuals from engaging in acts of terrorism, sabotage, or other serious criminal acts.

Another provision proposed in this anti-terrorism Bill is the criminalization against those who knowingly promote or otherwise encourage terrorist attacks against Canadians. Under Canada’s current laws a specific terrorism offence must be referenced in order to be a criminal act; under the new definition, any instructions to carry out terrorist attacks against Canadians can be a criminal offence subject to a maximum of five years in prison if convicted.

Another such proposal as is the ability to seize terrorist propaganda. This is a change that would be made to the Criminal Code (and be subject to an order by a Judge) that would allow materials to be seized if they promote or encourage attacks against Canadians or otherwise recruit those who would do Canadians harm. These changes would work in a similar manner as current provisions that enable child pornography to be seized.

Changes to Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Protection Act are also proposed as part of these eight key measures. It proposed that the Government can use and protect classified information to determine if non-Canadians can enter Canada or in other cases remain in Canada. Other proposed changes include modifications to Canada’s Passenger Protect Program (PPP). This is an air travel program that was created in 2007 and the proposed changes seek the removal of potential threats from commercial flights in a more expedited manner.

Aside from the measures already mentioned, the final key points cover a range of other initiatives such as increased information sharing between Canada’s national security agencies while adhering to the Privacy Act.

Other measures this bill introduces enhancements to witness protection and strengthened enforcement prevention provisions. The enhanced prevention provisions include the ability to detain suspected terrorists before they can harm Canadians. Although the threshold to make an arrest is lowered in these changes, they remain subject to judicial oversight by necessitating an authorization by a Judge for detention. Lastly Bill C-51 proposes enhancements to witness protection. Currently the witness protection program is structured to protect those who provide evidence in criminal matters. The changes proposed in the anti-terror bill similarly ensure that witnesses in matters involving national security are also protected.

This is a brief summary of the measures proposed in Bill C-51 "The Anti-terrorism bill". The Federal Liberals have indicated support for this Bill while the NDP position is still unclear (from my perspective). Although there were other items I had intended to include in this week's report, as this is a very important bill it has been the focus for my report this week. We've learned this week of arrests being made in Ottawa relating to terrorism by the RCMP and also of the disturbing execution of a pilot who savagely burned alive by the terror group ISIL, it is important that our Canadian laws allow our enforcement agencies to keep pace protecting Canadians and our way of life. If you have further comments, questions or concerns on this or any Bill before the House of Commons do not hesitate to contact my office. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

February 11th

I am often surprised at the number of different events occurring each week that can pose a challenge to provide a summary given the limited space available in my weekly columns. One topic that I believe is of interest and concern to all Canadians is last week's Supreme Court Ruling striking down Canada's existing law against assisted suicide. This is without question a subject that many Canadians have very strong feelings about. It is not uncommon as a Member of Parliament to hear a diversity of views on subjects of this nature. One such citizen who took the time to contact me has presented some serious concerns that I believe we should all be mindful of.

The citizen in question suffers from a very severe physical disability and opposes the legalization of assisted suicide. The reason for this opposition is not based on faith, nor a previous encounter with suicide or hope that a miracle cure will be discovered. The concern from this particular disabled citizen is guilt. As a severely disabled individual, this person relies very heavily on family to serve as specialized care givers. As many will know, providing specialized and end of life care for a severely disabled loved one can be a challenging experience. In this case the constituent who contacted me shared a great love and appreciation for family members in making great sacrifices to help them live a better quality of life.

The concern of this severely disabled constituent is that legalized suicide would create an easy option for this person to end their own life with the assistance of a willing doctor. This person expressed a strong will to live. They have no desire to die. Where assisted suicide is a concern to this person is over a profound level of guilt. This guilt comes from the significant ongoing efforts of family members in providing specialized care. As legalized suicide could end the need for that care by not pursuing suicide, this individual would feel intense guilt that they are imposing on loved one's when another

option is available. Suffice to say this was a difficult and emotional conversation and I apologize in advance that I am not relaying this concern in the manner it truly deserves.

I raise this point today as it illustrates a situation of a severely disabled person who does not wish to die but has admitted the guilt of not pursuing suicide to relieve family members from serving as care givers potentially would result in a reluctant suicide. This is not a situation I believe any Canadian would welcome and is one we should be mindful of in this discussion. I can also appreciate that there are other situations and different perspectives in this conversation that are deserving of consideration. As I believe all citizens share concerns on this subject I welcome your views, opinions and experiences. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free at 1-800-665-8711.

February 18th

As I have commented in the past, many of the major issues on Parliament Hill are often very different from the concerns heard back at home. MPs who are suspended from their caucus, satellite office expenses and costs of inappropriate partisan mailings, and most recently an MP floor crossing are issues that receive a considerable amount of media attention in Ottawa but are less frequently raised by citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla.

All of these issues are quite rare but floor crossings are unique as they tend to involve an MLA or an MP leaving one party they were presumably elected as a member of to join another party they were not first elected as a member of. As some may know the NDP have a long standing position that any floor crossing should automatically trigger a by-election, a position that we were reminded of last week continues to be subject to this debate.

In this conversation it is important to recognize that citizens can be elected without a party affiliation, often we refer to these citizens, once elected, as Independents. Likewise there may also be an MP or MLA who was elected as a member of a political party that decides to leave that party or join another. These can be very difficult decisions for all involved however they are legitimately recognized positions in public office. In fact the House of Commons Procedure and Practice manual confirms that "members are not obliged to retain that party label during the whole of their mandate." and further states "A Member who changes party allegiance is under no obligation to resign his or her seat and stand for re-election".

My thoughts on this? I disagree with the NDP position that a member crossing the floor should trigger a by-election. Ultimately a party cannot exist if it does not elect Members to a Parliament or Legislature in electoral ridings. For individually elected members to retain the right to leave a party, sit as an independent, or join another party are all means that a member can use to help ensure a party is held accountable. I mention this as also coming back before the House this week for debate is Conservative MP Michael Chong's private member's bill "The Reform Act of 2014", that seeks to rebalance Parliament by increasing the powers available to party caucuses, individual MPs and electoral riding associations. This has been a widely debated bill but one that most citizens I have heard from are supportive on and one that I have also supported within the House of Commons.

Over the past months as the federal election approaches we have witnessed how some willing candidates have been summarily dismissed and blocked from running for a particular party. In some cases cause is given but in many cases no cause is provided and in extreme circumstances litigation

has occurred. From my standpoint I have observed how some who are supportive of the democratic reform act have turned a blind eye to arbitrary candidate blocking. Ultimately this serves as a reminder to why the Democratic Reform Bill is one that should be taken seriously not just by elected officials, but also by those who are actively involved in various political parties and organizations that democracy should be an open process. Nomination battles, as they are sometimes called, can be challenging but they are an important part of our democratic process. For further comments and concerns I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

February 25th

Many citizens who took the time to contact me to convey support for my colleague Michael Chong and his Private Member's Bill C-586 "The Reform Act of 2014" will be encouraged to hear the bill, with a strong show of support with 260 votes in favour and 17 opposed, passed third reading this week. This is important as the bill must now proceed through the Senate in time for royal assent before the current Parliament dissolves in favor of the fall election. On the same subject I can also confirm that I voted in support of the Reform Act and will continue to follow the progress of this bill as it moves through the Senate.

Also occurring this week is continued debate over Bill C-51 "The Anti-Terrorism Act (2015)". Earlier this week both Government and Liberal MPs voted to support sending Bill C-51 to committee stage review while the NDP remains opposed. For further information about Bill C-51 please see my February 6th MP report or contact me directly at your convenience.

Another Government Bill returning to the House of Commons for report stage debate from committee review is Bill C-26 "Tougher Penalties for Child Predators Act". As I summarized in a previous report, Bill C-26 proposes a number of legislative changes in regard 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 of these changes.

Other Private Member's Bills coming before the House of Commons this week include Bill C-643 "National Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Day Act", Bill C-638 "An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act" and Bill C-637 "An Act to amend the Criminal Code" (firearms storage and transportation).

Next week I will be back in Okanagan-Coquihalla from Monday until Friday and am available for meetings and welcome your calls and emails. Please contact me via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or by telephone at 1-800-665-8711.

March 2015

March 4th

This week our Prime Minister announced that a new Government Bill will be introduced in the House of Commons early next week. This bill proposes to change the terms of parole for some of Canada's most disturbing and senseless acts of murder to ensure that in these situations a life sentence in jail more closely resembles a sentence for life. It will be proposed that in serious criminal cases that involve a conviction of first degree murder, that is murder that is both planned and deliberately executed, would be subject to a life sentence without parole.

What types of serious criminal offences would apply? A kidnap or sexual assault that results in a murder, first degree murder of police, correctional guards or other law enforcement personnel, and acts of terrorism are a few examples where life sentences without parole could apply.

Although parole eligibility would be eliminated in these situations those who have served a life sentence after a minimum of 35 years could apply to the Minister of Public Safety for exceptional release. Decisions on application for special release would ultimately be subject to Ministerial approval and not part of a conventional parole hearing process.

While these proposed changes would only impact a relatively small number of our most serious criminal offenders they will be welcome news for a very important segment of Canadians: the friends, families and victims who are left behind after such a senseless loss. Many are unaware that Canada's current parole entitlement to criminals means that even those with potentially no hope of release are still able to participate in a parole hearing every two years. For family and friends of a murdered loved one, this often results in travelling a significant distance to be forced to re-live one of life's most traumatizing moments every two years. It is a very painful process that is often referred to as "re-victimization" and as I have stated previously in the House of Commons, for victims it should not have to be this way.

While some think of well publicized murders such as Clifford Olson or Paul Bernardo, even here in Okanagan-Coquihalla the family and friends of the Johnson and Bentley families have been forced to re-live this tragedy as convicted murdered David Shearing remains eligible for these parole hearings. Last fall I presented a petition of over 10,000 signatures from Okanagan-Coquihalla to the Minister of Public Safety opposing the release of Mr. Shearing. For many volunteers, who in some cases have also lost loved ones, the process of collecting these signatures is a painful but important exercise.

Although there have been private members bills previously that have proposed an end to this re-victimization of families through the current parole process, none to date have received Royal Assent. A Government Bill, though not retro-active, would ensure families who have been victimized by brutal and senseless acts of first degree murder would not be forced to continue to revisit such a devastating trauma every two years. 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 or at 1 (800) 665-8711.

March 11th

As I have stated previously, there is no formal requirement for Members of Parliament to submit reports to citizens nor are there guidelines as to what format or frequency reports to local residents should have. From my perspective, the primary reason why I submit weekly reports is to pass on as much information as possible so that in turn I can hear feedback in the form of comments, concerns and questions from the people of Okanagan-Coquihalla. Although seldom a week will go by without hearing from citizens I have noted that some reports generate far more responses than others. I am always extremely grateful for the efforts of citizens to pass on comments and questions. At times these comments sometimes share deeply personal information that may help to better illustrate a citizens perspective on a certain area of concern. Citizens should know that all personal information provided to both an MLA and an MP are protected with the strictest of confidentiality and are not subject to freedom of information laws. Personal information is never shared without the consent of the individual in question; I raise this so that citizens can have confidence to freely contact their elected officials and share information in a secure manner.

In last week's report I outlined proposed changes to life sentences to ensure that for extremely serious & disturbing crimes (such as a crime involving heinous acts such as pre-mediated abduction, rape and murder), where a life sentence would mean a life sentence without a formal parole process. While the majority of the feedback I received was supportive of these proposed changes, some of the opposing criticism was also noteworthy. One such criticism was the suggestion that parole is largely an infallible process.

As I was reminded this past week long time residents of Summerland will know this is not the case. Citizens in Summerland will recall that in 1997 a criminal was released on parole only to promptly skip his curfew at a half-way house in Calgary. Located in Summerland was the ex-spouse of this recently paroled criminal. Like many victims of domestic violence this ex-spouse feared greatly for her safety and had specifically requested to be notified if her ex-spouse was released from prison on parole. No phone call ever arrived from the National Parole Board upon release nor when the curfew was breached at the half way house.

Sadly what did happen was a paroled criminal arrived at a Summerland motel where he located his ex-wife who was with her mother and the couple's two children. In front of his own two children in cold blood he murdered their mother and grandmother in a truly disturbing act of violence. These murders occurred while parole had been breached and also in spite of a no contact restraining order. Further investigation found no evidence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the murder, no evidence of mental health disorders and without remorse, regret or responsibility shown by the murderer. It should also be pointed out this murderer (under the rules at the time of the sentencing) is potentially eligible for parole in two years.

While these instances may be relatively rare, this is one of several tragedies I have encountered in Okanagan-Coquihalla. While the circumstances may differ what remains constant is that all too often the victims are forgotten. Out of respect for the now adult children I have refrained from using names in this particular case however we should not overlook that victims have rights and they should never be forgotten nor placed behind the rights of criminals. I welcome your comments and questions on this or any matter before the House of Commons and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or 1-800-665-8711.

March 18th

One of the more commonly used terms in Canadian federal political discussions is the “Ottawa bubble” that can have a variety of different meanings, but typically is used to describe the culture on Parliament Hill that is often very different from what exists in many Canadian communities.

From my own perspective there are two aspects of the Ottawa bubble that I find most discomfoting. One is the frequent trend to suggest that the views of everyday Canadians are irrelevant and only the views from interest groups and other highly partisan organizations are deserving of consideration in debate. As an example, frequently I find issues that are reported as being widely opposed in Ottawa are in fact strongly support by citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla. The other ongoing concern I have relative to discussion on Parliament Hill pertains to how your tax dollars are viewed in Ottawa, compared to in Okanagan Coquihalla.

To be clear, as taxpayers it is your money taken or otherwise paid to Ottawa from your wages, combined with various taxes and other user fees you pay that keep Ottawa running. The same applies to Victoria at the provincial level and also with your local municipality or regional district with property taxes. One thing all taxes have in common is that you pay them and the higher the amount of tax the more you will pay, the less money you will have remaining to provide for your own household expenses, savings or enjoyment. Conversely when taxes are cut, you will pay less and some of the money saved from taxes can be spent or saved in whatever manner best meets your personal needs.

I raise this point because in Ottawa, whenever our Government announces tax cuts you will seldom see the paying of less tax is reported as a savings for taxpayers. It is frequently, as was the case recently, reported as being a cost. From the perspective of many in Ottawa who depend upon your tax dollars for operating revenues, less taxes (that create savings to taxpayers) is a cost to them. It could mean fewer staff, less increases in wages or benefits, even the elimination of a program or possibly not the expansion or creation of another. For this reason the idea of citizens paying less in taxes tends to be looked down upon in Ottawa by those who earn a living from the payment of your taxes. Last year The Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report on Federal tax changes that received little attention however the report contained some interesting information.

Federal income tax cuts announced by our government have resulted in accumulated savings to Canadians of \$17 billion over the past decade. Likewise the cut to the GST rate has resulted in accumulated savings of \$13 billion over a similar time frame. The same report also found that these tax cuts most benefitted “low-middle income earners (households earning between \$12,200 and \$23,300), effectively resulting in a 4% increase in after-tax income”. Even the lowest income earners in Canada who do not pay some taxes were found to have realized an after-tax gain of 2.2%. Surprisingly the top 10% of income earners realized a net after-tax gain of just 1.4%. These findings are in stark contrast to the narrative that tax cuts only help the wealthy and penalize the poor. In reality this report concludes that tax cuts over the past decade have resulted in higher after tax net income for all Canadians. This is also consistently why the overwhelming majority of citizens I hear from in Okanagan-Coquihalla support tax cuts and do not favour higher taxes.

I mention these things because last week another report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer concluded that the recently announced family tax cut by our Government will, and I quote directly “will have a net fiscal impact of \$2.2 billion in 2015”. The Ottawa Bubble was quick to report this as a \$2.2 billion cost to Ottawa, however for Canadian families that is \$2.2 billion in tax savings that stays in your household budget and will not be spent in the Ottawa bureaucracy. While some oppose tax cuts and believe citizens should pay more in taxes- whether it be pension income splitting for seniors or income splitting for families, it is my view that all Governments must continue to strive for efficiencies and keep taxation levels affordable for all of its citizens. If you would like to share your thoughts with me on this or any other issue, I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

March 25th

The topic of my October 8th MP report from last year was outlining the Government of Canada`s intention (subject to a vote in Parliament) to implement a six month deployment in Iraq to join many of our allies engaged in an aerial combat mission against the terrorist organization ISIL. As the initial six month timeframe is soon to expire, earlier this week in the House of Commons our Prime Minister provided a report on the evolution of the situation along with a proposal that Canada renew its commitment to the international coalition and its mission against ISIL.

The Prime Minister stated that the good news is the alarming territorial spread of ISIL has been more or less halted and in some ways even pushed back. In large part this has been achieved in coordination with allied aerial bombing efforts that Canada is part of and from other response actions from the roughly 60 other members of the United Nations who have taken a stand against ISIL terrorism.

Aside from the military action against ISIL, Canada has also had success in helping to deliver humanitarian aid that includes help feeding 1.7 million people in Iraq, providing shelter and relief supplies to 1.25 million people and providing education to at least half a million children. Canada has also helped to support more than 200,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq with food, water, shelter and protection as it is well known ISIL will capture and murder aid workers, reporters and other humanitarian workers if not securely protected.

For these reasons it is proposed that Canada renew the mission against ISIL for a further 12 months similar to the initial terms with a few notable changes. Like the original mission, this would also require a vote in Parliament. The current commitment of 6 CF-18 fighter jets, 1 Polaris air-to-air refuelling aircraft and 2 Aurora surveillance aircraft including required pilots and ground personnel to support these aircraft including ground forces already in the region is proposed to remain the same. The most notable change is the proposal to join President Obama and US Forces in also bombing ISIL terrorists in regions of Syria, something that was not proposed in the original six month mission. The reason Canada proposes to join the United States in this effort is due to the fact that ISIL has frequently retreated forces and equipment into Syria as a safe haven from allied aerial attack. The Prime Minister has also stated clearly that any action against ISIL within Syria will be done without the “the express consent of the Syrian government”. Some have asked on the legalities of aerial bombing within Syria without the consent of the Syrian Government. The United States Government,

our lead ally in this mission, has presented legal grounds to the United Nations and in turn the Judge Advocate General legal analysis indicates these operations in Syria are legal and justifiable.

Much as was the situation previously both opposition parties have indicated they will continue to oppose military efforts against ISIL terrorism. I will continue to provide updates on this important matter as they become available. Also occurring this week in Ottawa has been ongoing committee review of Bill C-51 the Anti-Terrorism Act. Here the situation is different where the NDP continue to oppose the anti-terrorism bill while the Liberals have continued to vote with our Government in support of Bill C-51 as it moves through Parliament. As a reminder for further information on Bill C-51 please see my February 6th MP report. As always I welcome your comments and question on any subject before the House of Commons. I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free at 1-800-665-8711.

April 2015

April 1st

While the overnight temperature in Ottawa continues to be well below zero, the temperature inside the house has been steadily rising with vigorous debate on a number of bills and on Monday the vote to extend Canada's mission against the ISIL terrorist organization. As was the case previously with the initial six month mission the vote to extend for a further 12 months was passed. For more information on this topic please see my MP report from last week.

Another hot topic on Parliament Hill has been the ongoing committee stage review of Bill C-51, otherwise known as the anti-terror bill. With most of the witnesses having now presented their views, the committee finished the clause by clause review where a small number of clarifying amendments were approved. As has been the case since literally before Bill C-51 was introduced it remains opposed by the NDP and supported by both the Liberals and Government. For more information on Bill C-51 please see my February 6th MP report.

Also being debated or voted on this week is a number of private members bills and motions that include: motion M-533 "Citizen consultation preceding natural resource development", Bill C-628 "An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and the National Energy Board Act", Bill C-613 "An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Access to Information Act", Bill C-642 "An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act", Motion -550 "Rail service" and Bill C-644 "An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act".

In late October of 2013, I covered the topic of MP and Senator expenses and mentioned that the Auditor-General would be performing an audit of all Senator related expenses. While that audit is not yet complete it has been suggested it will be released prior to the end of June. Expenses of Members of Parliament are governed by the House of Commons through the Board of Internal Economy and published annually. MP expenses are also a subject I cover as part of my yearly accountability report, my last yearly report was released in November of 2014. In my view the expenses of elected officials should always be subject to scrutiny and I will continue to provide updates on this subject as they become available.

One item that was not well covered by Ottawa media this week but is very good news for Canada is a recent announcement from Honda Canada. Honda currently owns and operates a factory in Alliston, Ontario that will begin producing the next generation Honda CR-V. What is exciting about this announcement is that these next generations Honda CR-V's built here in Canada will be built for export to the European market. This is the first time in history that Honda will build vehicles in Canada for export to Europe and this is made possible by the Canada- EU free trade agreement that will eliminate a tariff of 10%. Although this particular announcement is largely to the benefit of Ontario here in Okanagan-Coquihalla and in British Columbia we have many high quality manufacturers who can also benefit from free trade access to the roughly 500 million consumers in the European market. While some have focussed on the recent oil price drop and resulting revenue shortfalls we should not ignore the importance of trade and the opportunity of new markets that can create jobs and support our local economies. If you have questions or comments on these or other Federal issues, I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or 1-800-665-8711.

April 15th

This week Canada hosted Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India for an official visit. For many Canadians this was a rare and exciting opportunity to see a world leader visit several parts of Canada where large crowds turned out in greetings. Prime Minister Modi's visit is also a reminder on the importance of positive international relationships between Canada and other countries. One announcement made during this visit is that roughly seven million pounds of uranium concentrate from Saskatchewan will be sold to India for electricity generation over the next 5 years. Canada is the 2nd largest Uranium exporter in the world with annual exports exceeding \$1 billion from an industry that support roughly 5,000 direct mining related jobs.

Also on the a similar theme of international relations, Canada announced this week that a contingent of roughly 200 Canadian Armed Forces training personnel will be deployed to Ukraine to assist with military training of Ukrainian forces. The training activities relate to explosive ordinance including dealing with improvised explosive device disposal, military police training and medical training. Flight safety and logistical assistance will also be provided to the Ukrainian National Guard. Many of these efforts will also be coordinated with the United States, who is also providing assistance to help ensure that Ukraine can better defend, maintain its sovereignty and provide for more stability in the region. This fulfills a request for assistance from the Government of Ukraine and will not be a combat role.

On a different subject, these past two weeks have been a welcome break from Parliament Hill. I have been meeting directly in different parts of Okanagan-Coquihalla with many citizens, groups and even a class of middle school students. On Thursday of last week I received an email from a concerned citizen that I believe is deserving of mention. The issue raised in the email was the subject of teenage suicide. It is not an issue often discussed and in fact it has been a long standing tradition that suicide is often reported in a way that intentionally does not disclose the means of death. While there are those who continue to support suicide being reported on in this manner, it has also been suggested that doing so fails to reveal the true extent that incidents of suicide and attempted suicide occur in our communities. The purpose of why I mention this subject today is to ask citizens for your input and experience on this topic. Has youth suicide or attempted suicide impacted you or someone you

know? I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has experiences on this subject. All responses will be treated as strictly confidential and as mentioned in a previous report, communications shared with elected Members of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies are exempt from freedom of information legislation requests.

Next week the House of Commons will again be in session, with the 2015 Budget set to be introduced along with the tabling of balanced budget legislation. Your comments and questions are welcome and can be sent to dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

April 22nd

This week our Government introduced the 2015 budget. One of the most significant aspects of this budget is that it is balanced with a \$1.4 Billion surplus that is forecast to eventually increase up to a \$4.9 Billion surplus in 2019. A balanced budget means that Canada has the lowest debt to GDP ratio in the G-7 and one of the lowest in the G-20.

Aside from being balanced, the 2015 budget also proposes a number of new measures; some already announced, such as the increased universal child care benefit and income splitting for families and other measures revealed on budget day. As is often the case, some budget measures have been widely supported – the reduction of the small business tax from 11% to 9% by 2019 has not only been supported by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, it is also supported by both the NDP and the Liberals after their leader initially voiced his opposition. However, expanding the Tax Free Savings Account (TFSA) maximum annual contribution to \$10,000 as proposed in Budget 2015, is opposed by both opposition parties.

Other measures in Budget 2015 include reducing the minimum withdrawal requirements in a Registered Retirement Income Fund (RRIF) account to provide more flexibility for those who are retired. A new home accessibility tax credit has also been introduced that will help seniors and those who are disabled with expenses for required eligible home renovations and modifications, helping people to stay independent and in their homes longer. Employment Insurance (EI) related to compassionate care has also been increased, effective January of 2016, from the current maximum of six weeks to six months to better reflect the challenges of caring for a gravely ill family member.

In other areas it has been proposed to eliminate in-study student income from the Canada student loans assessment process and also there will be a reduced assumed parental contribution level in the same assessment process. Student loans will also be extended for short term educational programs for qualifying low and middle income students. These measures are in addition to expanding the Student Grants program that was highlighted earlier this month in a previous report.

On a Provincial level British Columbia will see \$6.1 Billion in federal transfer payments this year – an important consideration given that former federal Governments actually decreased transfer payments to Provinces like BC. For the record federal transfer payments to BC, including the federal health transfer will continue to increase every year, supporting cherished programs like health care.

A few other measures that will be of benefit locally include a 10 year extension for tax incentives related to the investment of machinery and equipment. I have visited several local employers to see

firsthand how new machinery and innovation is creating jobs that are needed in our local resource communities. I am also encouraged that there will be further exemptions for charitable donations involving private share and real estate donations related to capital gains taxes. Given the good work of many local charitable organizations, Hospital Foundations are one excellent example, this will help ensure more equity from donations remain in communities instead of Ottawa.

Public transit, science and research, military, and law enforcement are some other agencies benefitting from Budget 2015 that column space does not allow me to provide more details on along with many other agencies and service areas. A few examples are the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Thirty Meter Telescope Project, Canadian Tourism Association and others. For further information on Budget 2015 or any matter before the House of Commons please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached via email at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free 1-800-665-8711.

April 29th

One thing that can be said about events on Parliament Hill is that no two weeks are ever the same. All Parliamentarians were sad to learn this week of the passing of Senator Pierre Claude Nolin, Speaker of the Senate and a member of the Red Chamber for over two decades. Like other Canadians, Senator Nolin battled a rare form of cancer. Our thoughts and prayers are always with friends and families who have lost a loved one to such a cruel disease.

Also occurring on Parliament Hill this week was a visit from King Abdullah II bin al Hussein of Jordan. For those who may be unaware Jordan is the first Arab country to successfully complete a free-trade agreement with Canada that came into effect in October of 2012. Jordan is also one of two countries that have signed a peace agreement with Israel. Jordan has also accepted a large number of refugees fleeing Syria and opposes the terror organization ISIL.

Not occurring in Ottawa but certainly in the minds of many Canadians is the devastating earthquake tragedy in Nepal. Canada has deployed and successfully landed a Canadian Forces C-17 aircraft to deliver much needed personnel and supplies to the region to assist and search for survivors. If any citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla know Canadians travelling in that area requiring consular assistance please contact the Consulate of Canada in Kathmandu, Nepal at +977 (1) 444-1976 or the High Commission of Canada in New Delhi, India at +91 11 4178 2000. The Government of Canada will also be matching donations made by Canadians to registered Canadian charities in response to the Nepal earthquake between April 25- May 25, 2015.

After we hold a final vote in the House of Commons on Budget 2015, we will then move to debating Senate Bill S-4, the Digital Privacy Act, as well as Government Bill C-46, the Pipeline Safety Act and a number of private member's bills and motions. For further information on any Bill before the House of Commons please contact me at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or call toll free 1-800-665-8711. I would also like to pass on my thanks to the many individuals each week who take the time to pass on comments and questions on my weekly reports. Your ongoing input is valued and appreciated.

May 2015

May 6th

Recently I was contacted by a media organization to do an interview on the subject of Government advertising. While I was not available at the requested time, I did offer an alternative day that my schedule in Ottawa could accommodate a live interview. Although the media organization in question suggested they would get back to my office instead they reported that I declined the interview, which was not accurate. I mention this because it is an example on how frequently information can be reported inaccurately even when from an otherwise credible media organization.

The subject of advertising and communications in general is one that is a challenge to all governments and also to elected MLA's and MPs. As many local media publications are aware there are growing restrictions on what an MP can and cannot advertise. In the case of elected Members of Parliament, all advertising by a Member is subject to restrictions and ultimately must be approved by the Member of Parliament. The costs of local advertising are part of the expenses that are deducted from the funds provided to an MP for consistency expenses within the riding and are reported in the annual Expenditures by Member report from the Board of Internal Economy. In my case last year I spent just under \$5,600 on advertising– a decrease from what was spent in the year prior.

Why advertise at all? Advertising in my view is one of many different means how elected Government can communicate directly with citizens. Public awareness, changes in taxation policy, where your money is spent, policy changes and public safety are just a few examples of topics that may be subject to advertising. One recent example is proposed changes to the Universal Child Care Benefit plan. These changes will see an increase in monthly payments to children under 6 and for the first time monthly support payments for children between 6 and 17 years of age. For most families these proposed changes (subject to Parliamentary approval) will see increased monthly supports arrive automatically once the implementation date occurs. However for some families with children under 18 who have never previously received the Universal Childcare Benefit, enrolment will be required. This raises the question how best to communicate the need to enroll? Advertising is one obvious solution and certainly some Members of Parliament have elected to do so. Part of why I submit weekly columns and engage in social media is in part because it is a cost effective way to communicate with citizens although far fewer will likely read my MP report this week compared to a running a quarter page sized ad. For more information on applying for the UCCB please visit this website: www.cra-arc.gc.ca/uccb/

Aside from the topic of advertising it has also been a lively week in Ottawa with a number of Bills and motions before the House. Bill C-51 the Anti-Terrorism Act passed 3rd reading with both the Liberals and Government in support and the NDP opposed. Private Members business this week includes Bill C-637 An Act to amend the Criminal Code (firearms storage and transportation), Bill C-641 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, Bill C-356 National Strategy for Dementia Act, Bill C-627 An Act to amend the Railway Safety Act and Motion M-591 Ferry services to Prince Edward Island.

For further information on these or any Bills before the House of Commons I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free at [1-800-665-8711](tel:1-800-665-8711).

May 13th

This has been an interesting week on Parliament Hill given a few well publicized verbal gaffes from two opposition party leaders. While I am frequently asked to comment when such episodes occur (usually from partisans of various stripes) in my view I believe ultimately how an elected official conducts themselves is a topic best left between an MP or MLA and the citizens they represent.

In Ottawa there is currently four weeks remaining until the House adjourns in June for what is expected to be the final sitting of this 41st Parliament. There has been sixty Government Bills introduced during this 2nd session of the 41st Parliament. Of those 60 Bills, 40 have received Royal Assent and of the remaining 20 there are currently five bills in the Senate leaving fifteen at various stages of debate in the House of Commons barring the introduction of any more Bills.

Aside from Government Bills there have also been 475 Private Members Bills introduced during this 2nd session. Of this 475, twelve have received Royal Assent; fourteen are currently before the Senate meaning that roughly 449 are still up for debate in the House of Commons. From a quick glance of the 449 Private Members Bills remaining in the House, roughly 10 have reached second reading with the majority at first reading, meaning they have been introduced but not yet debated. There have also been seven Senate Bills with one receiving Royal Assent to date and the remaining six at various stages of debate. Individually Senators have sponsored twenty seven bills with five having received Royal Assent and the rest still under debate.

What will happen to the bills that have not been passed? Before an election Parliament will be formally ended by a proclamation from the Governor General that is referred to as Dissolution. Upon dissolution all items on the *Order Paper* including government and Private Members' bills die. Thus when the House of Commons adjourns in this case any Bill not passed third reading will most likely not receive Royal Assent. While it is not uncommon for the Senate to sit beyond the House of Commons once the Senate has adjourned it is likely that any Bill not receiving Royal Assent will potentially die on the Order Paper in the Senate. The next election will see the creation of the 42nd Parliament and both Government and Members of that Parliament are free to sponsor bills similar or even precisely the same that may have existed and not been passed in this 41st Parliament.

If you would like more specific information or have questions on any Bill before the 41st Parliament please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-880-665-8711.

Before I conclude this week's MP report I would like to express sadness and condolences to the family of recently deceased former Osoyoos Mayor and Boundary-Similkameen MLA John Slater. Mr. Slater spent many years as a vibrant small town Mayor and gave greatly to the community of Osoyoos and the surrounding area. John Slater's contributions were many and he will be missed for his service and his friendly demeanour to all who worked with him.

May 20th

This week is the final constituency week before the House of Commons adjourns in late June for what is expected to be the final sitting of the 41st Parliament. Constituency weeks are important for Members of Parliament as they provide an opportunity to meet with groups and citizens in our home ridings to hear feedback and in many cases provided assistance in dealing with federal government programs and services.

Later in the week I will be travelling to the Lower Mainland to participate in a skills training related announcement that will outline details for a new program that will soon be available in many parts of Canada. What is exciting about this announcement is that the idea for the program in question originated with a citizen who lives within our riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla and his team at a BC based post-secondary institution.

Although this is not the first time a local citizen from our region has submitted a suggestion that resulted in national attention, it is from my own experience the first time a program has come forward from a local proposal to be implemented by Government. In my view the fact that a private citizen living in a relatively small community can submit an idea that can have national implications is exciting. It is also a testament to the importance of feedback, input and suggestions put forward by citizens to elected officials that in turn can be presented directly to the level of government they are elected to represent.

While this pending announcement will likely not receive a significant amount of media attention nor the fact that it came from a proposal from a private citizen, it is important to recognize the difference that Canadians can make in contributing ideas in how to build a stronger Canada. In my brief time as an elected official I have been fortunate to be involved in changes both related to local government and more recently the federal government. Many of these changes all came from ideas and suggestions from citizens and is one of the reasons why each year I do a listening tour.

For those of you who frequently read my weekly reports you will know that each week I ask citizens to always feel free to contact me with comments, questions and concerns on matters before the House of Commons. This is often where ideas come from and I would like to thank the many citizens who do take the time to respond and invite others to give me a call or send an email. When citizens work together with their elected representatives we can continue to build a stronger Canada. Please contact me via email at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

May 27th

I can now provide more information on the program that I referenced in last week's MP report. Last Friday I joined the Minister of Employment and Social Development, the Hon. Pierre Poilievre in announcing the new National Advanced Placement Prior Learning Program (N-APPL) for military veterans project, a project that originated from a proposal submitted by a local Peachland resident and his team at BCIT. This project is summarized as a Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) project that will apply credential recognition for military work to help Canadian Forces members enter relevant training programs at BCIT and elsewhere to help transition to civilian employment. This will help them to receive their desired credentials faster and will let them apply their CAF training to a new and rewarding field. As mentioned last week this proposal was submitted to me by a local citizen,

Mr. Fred Mandl of Peachland. I would like to publicly recognize and thank Mr. Mandl for this proposal that will help veterans increase skills training that in turn can help enhance employment opportunities. After speaking with young veterans who have already benefitted from the original BCIT based trial program, we can all be proud of this made in BC initiative being rolled out across Canada. There is also evidence that this ground breaking methodology could apply to other areas such as the trades. I will continue to encourage and support new approaches like these as they develop.

In Ottawa this week I participated in the debate regarding the subject of federal research scientists and allegations of Government sanctioned muzzling. As many citizens are aware we are fortunate in Okanagan-Coquihalla to have two federal research facilities in our region. Over the past years I have been fortunate to meet a number of scientists from these facilities to learn more about the important work they do and in turn I have also shared some of this information in the House of Commons. To date I have never had any of our local scientists suggest to me they are muzzled or otherwise prevented from sharing information with relevant stakeholders. We are fortunate in our region to have many dedicated scientists who are doing excellent work in support of local agriculture and also measurement science. In fact I often hear from citizens how much they enjoy reading local columns from Ken Tapping, an astronomer from the National Research Council's Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory located in Okanagan Falls.

Another event that has generated a fair amount of discussion in Ottawa this week was an announcement from the Finance Minister that Government will undertake consultations over the summer on the topic of a voluntary expansion to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). The topic being explored would be to allow for citizens to voluntarily increase their CPP contributions as a means to supplement their retirement savings. Most of the feedback I have heard on this subject so far has been supportive of this idea although a few individuals have suggested an increased CPP should be mandatory and not voluntary. I welcome your thoughts on this or any topic before the House of Commons. I can be reached via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

June 2015

June 3rd

A number of events are occurring in Ottawa on and around Parliament Hill this week. One event that I believe is of interest to all Canadians are ceremonies related to the release of the summary report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. For those who may be unfamiliar, this was a report into one of our countries darkest times as aboriginal children were taken from their families and communities to attend residential schools. For many aboriginal students horrific injustices occurred in these institutions where it has been revealed that children suffered serious abuse, violence, and thousands of children were never to return home. In some cases the location and remains of loved ones are still unknown to family members.

The summary report released this week is roughly 400 pages and contains 94 recommendations intended to help achieve true reconciliation. The full report will be released in the near future that will also be responded to by government. Some of the key recommendations involve increased

education for all Canadians regarding the history of residential schools in Canada as well as improving education for first nation's children and greater efforts to close the poverty gap that exists in many first nation communities. From my perspective I believe we must work in partnership to identify solutions that reduce poverty and increase education completion rates. It is also important to focus on employment and healthy living including accessible healthcare. True reconciliation is an important principle to help overcome this unacceptable chapter in Canadian history. We must also recognize the courage of many victims who came forward to share their painful experiences with the commission. I will report again on this important topic again when the full report is released and more information is available.

This week in Ottawa also saw the release of the independent investigation and related report into the shooting that occurred on Parliament Hill in October of 2014. This report concluded that 56 shots were fired between RCMP and House of Commons security. Of the 56 shots fired 31 hit the assailant with 2 of these 31 considered to be rapidly fatal. Neither drugs nor alcohol were detected in the post-mortem investigation of the deceased. The report also identified areas of concern with respect to House of Commons security protocols and in total proposes 66 recommendations.

Closer to home I have been asked for comment regarding child killer Allan Schoenborn being issued escorted day pass by the BC Review board. For those who may be unaware, in 2008 Mr. Schoenborn murdered his three children: 10-year-old Kaitlynne, 8-year-old Max, and 5-year-old Cordon in Merritt before fleeing police. I have heard from the family directly who shared this horrific tragedy with members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in June of 2013. This was truly one of the most heartbreaking events heard by this committee as the family continues to live in fear of Mr. Schoenborn to this very day. This is an example where parts of our justice system still can fail victims and families. Although legal changes have occurred since this disturbing act of violence was committed these changes cannot be applied retroactively and will not change this difficult situation for the family. In my view these situations are unacceptable and I will continue to support putting the interests and concerns of families and victims ahead of criminals. No family should be forced to relive a horrific event and live in fear for their safety. I welcome your comments and questions on the subjects mentioned today or any other matter before the House of Commons. I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free at 1-800-665-8711.

June 10th

Although there are a number of events occurring in Ottawa this week, the issue that is dominating most of the media spotlight is the recently released audit of the Senate from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG). This audit of the Senate covered the fiscal periods of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, reviewed \$186 million in spending contained in roughly 80,000 expense items involving 116 sitting and recently retired Senators.

The findings? Of the \$186 million reviewed in the AG Senate Audit approximately \$975,000 has been identified as either questionable or spent in a manner that is not in accordance with Senate rules. This questionable spending involves 30 of the 116 Senators audited; 21 of the 30 Senators have been publicly listed in the OAG Senate audit while the remaining 9 of these 30 Senators, also publicly named, have been referred to law enforcement for further investigation.

The OAG Senate audit also provided an opportunity for Senators identified in the audit to respond to the expense claims that have been referenced in addition there is also Senate created process that involves dispute resolution where there is disagreement. The Senate expense resolution process will be led by retired Supreme Court justice Ian Binnie. While it is not possible in the space of this column to list all of the Senator responses to the audit to date some Senators have admitted error in certain cases and made repayments while other claims are in dispute.

Auditor General Michael Ferguson has also made observations and recommendations regarding the Senate audit that include concerns over a lack of accountability and transparency and that in many areas Senators can make decisions that are more economical for taxpayers. In total the AG has called for a transformational change in how expenses are administered and the need to do so in a more accountable and transparent manner.

My thoughts? I have long been a supporter of increased transparency and accountability. This is why I make a point of publishing an annual accountability report that includes many items either not normally publicly disclosed or not easily located. To date my annual accountability reports have been well received and I encourage all elected officials to find ways to share similar information. One concerning aspect of the Senate audit is that while just under \$1 million in potentially questionable spending has been identified, the cost of this particular OAG Audit of the Senate is currently listed as \$23.6 million. While I continue to fully support increased accountability and transparency it is also important for cost effective solutions to be identified. Canadians deserve a process that creates confidence in how your tax dollars are spent with regard to expenses of elected Members of Parliament and un-elected Senators.

It is also important to recognize that while some have promoted the idea of eliminating or de-funding the Senate, this could not be achieved without a national constitutional consensus among all of our Canadian Provinces and Territories. For more information on the Canadian Senate please see my February 26, 2013 MP report. For more information on the OAG Senate Audit or any matter before the House of Commons please contact me dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or call toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

June 17th

Now retired Speaker of the BC Legislature and local MLA Bill Barisoff once commented that the wheels of government often turn slowly but they do continue to turn. It was over a year ago in one of my April 2014 MP reports that I first referenced the serious concern of aquatic invasive species here in the Okanagan and in particular the need to take action on invasive freshwater mussels. This was an issue that was raised by the Okanagan Basin Water Board, various local government elected officials and also citizens within Okanagan-Coquihalla. Since that time I have been actively working on this issue in Ottawa in the hopes that invasive species regulations that help to address this important situation would be introduced and become legally enforceable.

In December of 2014 I sent out a news release to local media encouraged over the announcement of proposed invasive species regulations that had at that time just been publicly introduced. These proposed Canada wide regulations had been announced by my Kelowna Lake Country colleague MP Ron Cannan and I on behalf of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Gail Shea, along with other important stake holders in attendance. From that point the proposed regulations undergo a formal

review process until they are released in the Canada Gazette, when they become legally enforceable. While it is understandable this review process would take time, once May and now June has arrived, so does boating season on many of BC's freshwater lakes. The need for the regulations to be in force is time sensitive and an important measure towards prevention. For the past month this has been one of my priority tasks in Ottawa and it is without haste that I can now announce that as you read this week's MP report our new invasive species regulations have been published in Canada's Gazette and are now in force.

It is important to recognize that this is one of many steps required to protect British Columbia freshwater lakes; however all steps can and will make a difference. From my perspective it is also important that I make clear as a Member of Parliament the concerns I take forward to Ottawa are those that are raised here in the riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla. On that note I would like to recognize West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and the rest of the OBWB staff and directors along with many citizens who expressed concern on this issue. While there is more work to be done it is rewarding to have these new regulations in place in spite of nearly fourteen months elapsing since my first report on this subject in 2014. My thanks to all who worked hard to raise concern on this important issue.

This is also the last full week the House of Commons will be in session with only a few sitting days expected for next week. Later this week the Board of Internal Economy will also release the annual publishing of the members' expenditures report for 2014-2015. This is important information for taxpayers as it relates to the annual spending of Members of Parliament. As with previous years I will use this and other information to release my 4th annual accountability report in the near future and will welcome your scrutiny. If you have any comments or questions on matter before the House of Commons I can be reached via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll-free at 1-800-665-8711.

Dan Albas is the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and writes this weekly report for his constituents. His website is www.danalbas.com and has an archive of previous reports.

June 25th

Although it has been reported that the 41st Parliament is now dissolved, technically the House stands adjourned and is set to reconvene in September however as the election writ is expected to be dropped prior it is widely expected that this 41st Parliament will not sit again. The end of any legislative session is always a busy time in the scramble to see Bills passed from the House of Commons to make it into the Senate hopefully to make it through the upper chamber for Royal Assent.

This was a process I went through with my private member's Bill C-311 on wine importation back in June of 2012 and was also a process that my colleague MP Michael Chong went through late last week with his private members bill on democratic reform. As many may recall the Reform Act of 2014 is one I have supported in Parliament and referenced in a few previous MP reports. It is also a Bill that has just received Royal Assent and is now law. I would like to thank the many citizens who took the time to communicate with me on that particular bill as well as others. On a similar theme this week I was also pleased to learn that the Province of Nova Scotia has now joined the "Free My Grapes" initiative and will also now be allowing direct to consumer shipping of BC wine to citizens in

Nova Scotia and conversely BC residents can order some of the excellent wines of Nova Scotia. It is rewarding that four Canadian Provinces are now supporting the free trade of Canadian wine with potentially more to follow. On that note I would also like to recognize the BC Government who continues to work towards the removal of inter-provincial trade barriers in support of our local economies.

Near the conclusion of the 41st Parliament I had an opportunity to thank the many outgoing Parliamentarians and House of Commons staff who have worked very long hours away from family during the operations of the House over the past four years. On the same note I would also like to wish a happy retirement to Southern Interior Member of Parliament Alex Atamanenko. MP Atamanenko represented a large and diverse riding and has worked hard over the past nine years in Ottawa. I know that Mr. Atamanenko's friendly demeanour and sincere advocacy on issues will be warmly remembered by many of his constituents.

By the numbers the 41st Parliament was a productive one with the passing of roughly 117 Government Bills, 44 other private Bills and 30 motions from Private Members, all over the past four years. It has been reported that no other Parliament in the past two decades has had as much legislation pass through the House of Commons. The past four years have also witnessed two different leaders of the official opposition due to the untimely passing of former NDP leader Jack Layton as well as two Liberal leaders, once an interim leader was replaced with Mr. Trudeau. This Parliament was also described as one of the youngest when first elected and of course also the first with the NDP as the official opposition party as the Liberals were the third party in the House. In October of 2014 an armed assailant attacked the House of Commons before being killed by security officers. This disturbing event was not actually the first of its kind. In 1966 an assailant blew himself up in a Centre Block bathroom while prepping a bomb. Overall the 41st Parliament has been through a number of events that has also included some all night sittings, extended hours, filibusters and of course exchanges of colorful and at times interesting language.

In roughly four months time Canadians will again head to the polls to elect Canada's 42nd Parliament. What the composition and structure of that Parliament will be like is up for Canadians to decide and that is one of the true privileges of living in a democracy.

July 2nd

One of my favourite days of the year is Canada Day. For an elected official it provides a unique opportunity to engage with many citizens from many corners of Okanagan-Coquihalla and hear about the many things most loved about our country and also to receive questions and concerns. One question that I heard from many citizens this year is "Why don't we abolish the Senate?". It is an excellent question.

The short answer to this question is in large part because the Senate is part of our Constitution and a constitution, by its design, is inherently difficult to change. In fact one well respected constitutional law professor recently observed that Canada's constitution may be one of the most challenging to amend in the world. Fortunately, one of the roles of our Supreme Court is to respond to questions of law or fact concerning the interpretation of our Constitution. In February of 2013 our Government posed a number of questions to the Supreme Court including how the Senate might be lawfully reformed or abolished. In 2014 the Supreme Court responded to these questions.

How did the Supreme Court rule? In essence the Senate cannot be reformed or abolished without unanimous support by both chambers of Parliament, as well as all Provincial and Territorial Legislative Assemblies giving their consent to do so. This is obviously a much higher threshold than the general amendment formula sometimes referred in constitutional circles as 7/50- requiring at least the approval of seven Provinces representing at least half of the Canadian population. Unanimous support may seem to some to be an achievable outcome, more so here in Western Canada where the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have recently stated support for Senate abolishment and it is likely the new Alberta government may take a similar position. The BC Government has also indicated it is open to exploring all options. However further east Quebec has firmly opposed Senate abolition as have some of the Maritime Provinces including PEI and Nova Scotia. This is not surprising given that east of Quebec there are a total of 30 Senators compared to 24 Senators for all of Western Canada.

The challenge in abolishing the Senate is that it will require a full Canadian constitutional debate involving Parliament and all of the Provinces and Territories that will also run the risk of being divisive as it would pit different regions of the country against each other. This would also come at a time where Canada has many other important priorities that cannot be ignored. Closing the gap that exists in many first nations communities, continuing to build infrastructure, supporting jobs and our local economies are a few topics that come to mind of national importance. My intent is by no means to defend the Senate but rather to provide context as to some of the constitutional challenges that exist with respect to abolition or reform.

While on the topic of the Senate last week the Red Chamber (as it is sometimes referred to) was in session to debate and pass a number of Bills that have now received Royal Assent. However as mentioned in my May 13th MP report a number of Bills between the House of Commons and the Senate were not passed. One of these bills was C-518 from my Conservative colleague MP John Williamson. Bill C-518 proposed a mechanism that Members of Parliament and Senators convicted of serious crimes would no longer be entitled to collect a generous taxpayer provided Parliamentary pension and related benefits. This bill was supported by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and all local citizens that I heard from. This was a bill I voted for and spoke in support of and was disappointed it did not pass in this 41st Parliament. As the House is now adjourned I encourage citizens to contact me via email at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or call toll-free at 1-800-665-8711.

July 8th

In early June the Supreme Court of Canada rendered a judgement with respect to how medical marijuana may be consumed. A brief summary of this ruling is that the Supreme Court decided that medical marijuana, including extracts and derivatives, could be consumed in a variety of different methods beyond the previously defined means of being dried. In essence this ruling opens the door for oral ingestion that does not require "smoking" and allows marijuana laced baked goods, pills and other methods. Also included are cannabis oils along with both dried and now fresh marijuana buds and leaves.

As a result of this ruling Health Canada this week has responded to the Supreme Court decision by announcing a section 56 exemption that will allow licensed producers to produce and sell cannabis oil

and fresh marijuana buds and leaves in addition to dried marijuana. It should also be noted that the current regulations related to Doctors in authorizing marijuana for medical use does not change as a result of this week's Health Canada changes. The new exemption, in place immediately, will continue to require licensed producers to ship in a safe and secure manner, with child-resistant packaging. From a technical standpoint the THC content in Cannabis oils cannot exceed 30mg per ml. A label will also be required to disclose the THC content of the supplied product. There are also a number of administrative and transaction related requirements that will continue to apply. Currently in Canada there are 25 licensed producers in various regions across the country. Health Canada also reminds all Canadians that medical marijuana is not an approved drug or medicine in Canada and has not gone through the necessary rigorous scientific trials for efficacy or safety.

Recently I have had a few questions regarding the ongoing financial crises in Greece. As many citizens are likely aware Greece has voted against the European Union's loan extension requirements. This is a serious situation as one in four in Greece are unemployed and the country cannot pay its bills as the banking system is in near collapse. The question I have been asked is did Canada have money loaned to Greece as part of a bailout package. The answer is no, as our Government declined to loan money to Greece, a decision made by our Prime Minister that was criticized by the leader of the official opposition who supported loaning Canadian tax dollars for the Greek bail out. While the current Greek financial crisis remains a serious concern it is also important to recognize the importance of all Governments to live within its means. While not widely reported, late last week the Ontario Government had its credit rating downgraded- that in turn can lead to increased interest on borrowing costs that can be problematic for a Government not running a balanced budget. Fortunately closer to home the BC Provincial Government has worked aggressively to ensure that BC's well respected credit rating remains unchanged. On the same theme, the Federal Government has also maintained its AAA credit rating, which is important to ensure that more funds can be spent in areas such as infrastructure as opposed to paying higher levels of interest.

As Parliament is not in session, I am continuing my office's fourth annual summer listening tour where I formally and informally meet with various constituents and organizations throughout our area. Previous tours have resulted in a number of items for me to take forward that were well received in Ottawa. If you would like to schedule a meeting please contact me via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or call toll free at 1-800-665-8711. Concerns, questions and suggestions are always welcome.

July 16th

One subject that sometimes arises that I have not covered in detail previously is transfers from the federal government to provincial governments and territories. The Federal Government has different transfer programs such as the CHT "the Canada Health Transfer", CST "the Canada Social Transfer" and lastly the Equalization program. What are these transfers programs intended to help fund?

The Canada Health Transfer is the largest transfer program to Canadian provinces and territories. The intent is to provide long term defined funding to assist with the delivery of health care. Recently some claims (including TV commercials) have been made that the Canadian Health Transfer funding has been cut or otherwise reduced by our Government. In reality these claims are false and misleading. Funding in real dollars for the Canada Health Transfer increases every year. From 2011 up until 2016/17 the annual increase in funding is set by legislation at 6% per year. In 2017-2018

the formula for increasing this health transfer funding is set to change in that it will increase at a rate based on a three year moving average of nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However at a minimum provinces and territories will be guaranteed an increase of at least 3% per year or greater, depending upon the formula. In other words, every year Canadian Provinces & Territories will receive a larger Canada Health Transfer than the year previously – there is no year when a province or territory would receive anything but an increased health transfer. Worthy of note is that the CHT monies and its scheduled increases are independent of whether the province or territory in question increases or reduces its overall spending in health care; also as provinces have jurisdiction in their delivery of health care, it is provincial elected officials that decide their own priorities and how the CHT is to be utilized.

The Canada Social Transfer is intended to assist provinces and territories in providing post-secondary education, social assistance programs as well as early childhood development, learning and daycare. These funds are calculated on an equal per capita basis and in 2014-15 are set in legislation announced by our Government to increase annual by 3% each year. This way Provinces & Territories have certainty that Federal transfer dollars for social transfers, like the health transfer, will increase each yearly at a predictable rate. Likewise how these dollars are spent is decided by the Province or Territory.

The Equalization program is perhaps the best known transfer program that is intended for “addressing fiscal disparities among provinces”. While it is sometimes suggested this program be eliminated as it can be viewed as financially rewarding poor provincial governance, it should be noted that the equalization program was entrenched in our Canadian Constitution by the Trudeau Liberal Government in 1982. Although equalization payments are intended to provide comparable services between Provinces these transfers are unconditional and a Provincial Government can spend these funds in any manner they desire. Equalization transfers are based on a provinces ability to raise revenue, a terms described as “fiscal capacity”. Each province will have its fiscal capacity compared to the average fiscal capacity of all Canadian provinces to determine if they are below this average or not. Provinces have two options: get the greater of the amount they would receive by fully excluding natural resource revenues, or by excluding 50 per cent of natural resource revenues. Equalization transfers increases are also based on a three year moving average of GDP growth. Again, provinces decide how best to utilize these funds.

In terms of actual dollars Canada wide over the past decade the Canada Health Transfer has increased from \$20.3 billion up to \$34 billion while the Canada Social Transfer has increased from \$8.4 billion up to just under \$13 billion. The Equalization program has gone from \$10.9 billion up to \$17.3 billion. It should also be noted that in 2015 Newfoundland & Labrador, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan did not receive equalization as they are in effect “have” Provinces under the equalization formula. A rough breakdown of \$17 billion in equalization funding includes Quebec received \$9.5 billion, Ontario \$2.3 billion, Manitoba \$1.7 billion, Nova Scotia \$1.69 billion, New Brunswick \$1.66 billion and PEI \$53 million.

In total Canada wide transfers for all Provinces and Territories has risen from \$ 41.9 billion in 2005 up to \$68 billion in 2015. As these are your tax dollars it is important for citizens to have a clear understanding that despite false claims of federal transfers being reduced in reality each year federal transfer payments are increasing to Canadian Provinces and Territories to help fund critical services

that Canadians depend upon. Your comments and questions are welcome dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

July 25th

It is hard to believe this will be my fourth annual accountability report as time has gone by quickly since being first elected in 2011. Like my previous accountability reports this is a summary of my expenditures over the past fiscal year as the Member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla. As with previous reports I will follow the format using information from the most recent fiscal period of April 1st of 2014 up to March 31st of 2015 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 in previous years, 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 typically higher than those of MP's from other areas in Canada as a result of the fact that we fly further distances between B.C. and Ottawa. My personal travel expense during this time frame was just over \$ 52,000; this is an increase of \$3,000 over the \$49,000 spent last year but still down from \$55,000 spent in 2013. In my case this works out to roughly 420 hours in an airplane, the vast majority spent flying regular coach class.

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 \$371,517. Like previous years this 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 \$441,536 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.

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 or at 1-800-665-8711.

This year we have seen a number of forest fires in Okanagan-Coquihalla. These situations can be particularly demanding in interface areas for those who are evacuated as well as those that are often the last line of protection. While some fires like we saw at Hamilton Hill near Merritt can be quickly and effectively extinguished, we must remain mindful that despite advances in technology and techniques, this work is inherently dangerous and requires amazing amounts of work, coordination

and ingenuity. For many of us we can only imagine the sacrifice and perseverance that it takes to contain such fires.

I was glad to join Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Premier Christy Clark with other elected officials at Shelter Cove- Westside Road fire near West Kelowna to hear firsthand the experiences of those who are courageously fighting this fire. One gentleman who led the crew spoke of his years of dedication to firefighting and sense of service that he and his crew drew upon on daily to tackle such gruelling work. It was very gratifying to hear both leaders on behalf of British Columbia and Canada respectively, publicly praise the crew and the multitudes of other Canadians who also are working to keep their communities and areas safe. I would encourage all citizens of Okanagan-Coquihalla who have the opportunity to do so to also extend their thanks.

July 31st

Even in the heat of summer the Ottawa rumour mill is still continuing to churn out reports on events that may or may not be occurring in our nation's capital. The latest media speculation circulating is that the writ for our upcoming federal election may be dropped as early as this Sunday. For the record I have no idea if this is accurate or not however this does present a good opportunity to explain what the writ dropping means to citizens in Okanagan-Coquihalla and elsewhere.

A writ is "dropped" when the Prime Minister presents the Governor General with an instrument of advice recommending the House of Commons be dissolved. In turn the Governor General then issues a proclamation dissolving what in this case will be the 41st Parliament. The Prime Minister will then present an order in council to the Chief Electoral Officer requesting the writ of an election that is also issued from the Governor General. At this point the Chief Electoral Officer will then send a writ of election notice to each returning officer across Canada. From this point on the writ period has begun and by Canadian law must be a minimum campaign length of thirty six days. There is technically no maximum length for a writ period although the House of Commons, much like a Provincial legislature, is required to sit at least once every twelve months.

What is different about a writ period? There are a number of rules that apply within a writ period that do not apply outside of a writ period including full disclosure and limits on how much political parties and 3rd party advertisers can spend within the writ period. In addition any staff working on a campaign must be disclosed as must in kind donations at fair market value. These strict rules are in addition to existing rules regarding Members of Parliament constituency offices which prohibit their use for partisan purposes in any way, a restriction that also applies to all House of Commons taxpayer provided resources.

Locally Okanagan-Coquihalla will also cease to be an electoral district as a result of new federal boundary redistribution process that occurs every ten years. In our case there have been some significant changes to Okanagan-Coquihalla. The new riding most closely resembling the old riding is now called Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola. Communities such as Summerland, Peachland, West Kelowna, Merritt, and Logan Lake remain in this riding however Penticton will now join a new riding called South Okanagan-West Kootenay. Making up for the loss of the Penticton population in Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola results in adding communities such as Princeton, Keremeos and surrounding areas and part of the city of Kelowna. If you are looking to confirm what federal

riding you are located in please visit www.elections.ca for further information.

When is the election? The fixed election date calls for a federal election on Monday, October 19th. Who to vote for? Currently there are a number of candidates already declared to be running in the 2015 election with possibly more on the way. Elections Canada will have a list of declared candidates available and I encourage all members of the public to contact candidates directly to ask questions and share concerns.

Only a final note many have asked recently about new rules that prevent expat Canadians from voting. In reality there are no new rules related to this topic as it was in 1993 that the Parliament of the day passed legislation that prevented Canadian citizens living outside of Canada for 5 or more years from voting. What did occur recently is a court challenge where last week the Ontario Appeals Court upheld the rule that citizens living outside of Canada for five or more years cannot vote in Canadian elections. If you have other questions comments or concerns I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

October 2015

October 21st

In a little over three week's time Canadians will gather on the 11th day of the 11 month at the 11th hour to honour those brave Canadians who made the supreme sacrifice in defence of freedom and democracy. On October the 19th it was encouraging to see one of the largest electoral turnouts in over two decades as Canadians attended the polls and advanced polls in large numbers for our nations 42nd general election. Locally in our new riding of Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola our voter turnout of 71.8% was even higher than the national average of 68.5%. I believe this can be attributed to the fact that we had some very good candidates representing our national political parties who all ran very robust and honourable campaigns. It is also fair to say that increased turnout was reflected as a result that voters wanted a change. A change in Government and also a change in official opposition.

While some will be happy with the election results and others disappointed I think we can all agree it is exciting to live in a free and democratic country where citizens can come out and vote for change. It is also incumbent upon elected officials to hear and respect the message sent from voters. As the newly elected Member of Parliament it is a great honour to represent this region in Ottawa and I would like to sincerely thank citizens for their support and also the other candidates who ran campaigns that talked about the issues and how we can best build stronger communities in this riding. I would be remiss if I also did not point out that a majority of citizens in this riding voted for other candidates. Ironically my share of the vote at 39.5% was identical to the share of the Liberals who formed a majority government also with a 39.5% share of the vote that was similar to the 39.6% majority of the Conservative government in 2011. One of the many promises of the incoming Liberal Government is to implement electoral reform, a topic that I welcome your views on.

From an Ottawa perspective there will now be many hectic weeks during the transition period as the new Government must logistically move into place, staff must be hired and other arrangements made

not unlike what will occur with many newly elected Members of Parliament, including here in the Okanagan. On that note I would like to take a moment to sincerely thank our local departing MP Ron Cannan for his many years of service to our region. Ron worked tirelessly on behalf of the entire Okanagan region and his representation was always honourable and positive.

Currently the new Government has not yet set a date when Parliament will be recalled although the new cabinet is expected to be announced in early November. As a member of the official opposition I am looking forward to the opportunity of holding the new government to account on your behalf and continuing to bring your concerns to Ottawa. Citizens deserve to be heard and my commitment to work on your behalf begins today. I welcome your comments, questions and concerns and can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or 1-800-665-8711.

October 28th

The interior of BC now has four new and two returning Members of Parliament, one with the incoming government, three with the official opposition and the two remaining with the third party (as it is frequently referred to within the House of Commons). In some situations the electoral boundaries between these different Members of Parliament may be geographically well defined but may not be convenient for citizens due to different MP office locations or how the electoral boundaries commission arbitrarily applied riding borders that may have separated closely linked communities. These situations often create a challenge for citizens to decide which Member of Parliament they should contact for assistance in the event the Member of Parliament who is closest and most convenient, may in fact be representing a different electoral region.

Wherever possible citizens should contact the Member of Parliament who represents the electoral region they reside in. The reason for this is that Members of Parliament have unique legislated rights and protections under various acts of Parliament to represent citizens specifically located within their electoral region. In addition, Members of Parliament are provided with generous resources to assist citizens, even those in remote areas of a riding. On the same theme citizens also have a right to contact Members of Parliament from other electoral regions for assistance that may or may not be provided depending upon the circumstances and the discretion of the MP in question. From my own experience it is common for MPs from other parties and or regions to refer citizens to their own MP as this respects the intent of Canada's single-member, simple-plurality voting system.

From my perspective as the Member of Parliament for Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola, my office will continue to assist citizens to the best of our ability and will also look forward to working with other MPs in our region regardless of party affiliation. Ultimately assisting citizens remains my top priority and I expect our newly elected Members of Parliament will also share this sentiment as they work towards opening up new constituency offices as soon as is reasonably possible.

Unfortunately there is little news to share from Ottawa at the moment as the transition period will be under way for many weeks and it is still unclear when the House of Commons will be recalled by the new Government, once in place. Next week will likely be more active as it is expected a new cabinet will be announced and potentially a date will also be revealed on when the House of Commons will resume. Normally in a non-election year the House would have sat for five weeks at this point with another five weeks schedule prior to the end of the year.

On a closing note I would like to thank the many citizens who have taken the time to share your thoughts and comments with me over the past ten days. The volume of feedback has been significant and is greatly appreciated. I welcome your input and can be reached via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

November 2015

November 4th

Ottawa is once again a hub of activity as Members of Parliament have arrived in our capital and for a few days many departing and retiring MP's will also be in attendance as the changeover occurs. The 42nd Parliament is so far a very demanding one on House administration as there are over 200 newly elected rookie MP's that will require offices, staff, orientation and training that can lead to delays in getting up and running. Also occurring this week was the official swearing in ceremony for our incoming Prime Minister at Rideau Hall along with the traditional swearing in of the new cabinet.

The new Liberal cabinet at 31 members is smaller than the 39 member cabinet that was announced after the 2011 election by our former Prime Minister. The new cabinet also follows a gender parity policy mandated by the Liberals, so there are fifteen women and 15 men in the new cabinet. If you are wondering why the math does not add up to 31 members, it is due to Prime Minister Trudeau naming himself as a Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth in his cabinet.

My thoughts? While it is somewhat customary for opposition members to criticize a newly appointed cabinet, I will largely refrain. For any newly elected Premier or Prime Minister, it is always a challenging task to select a cabinet where there are so many different variables that must be taken into consideration and compromises are not always popular. On a local level I have heard some complaints that British Columbia has just three cabinet seats compared to Ontario and Quebec that have 18 seats combined; however I would caution that the appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries have yet to be announced by Prime Minister Trudeau and I believe there is a good chance one or more will end up in British Columbia and may likely include our new Kelowna-Lake Country MP Steven Fuhr.

I would also like to congratulate our new Ministers who are from British Columbia that include Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of National Defence Harjit Singh Sajjan and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities Carla Qualtrough, all from the Lower Mainland. A criticism I do have of the new cabinet is that one of the portfolio's that was eliminated to achieve a smaller cabinet means there is no longer a Minister of State for Seniors and this is also a concern I will share in Ottawa.

Finally this week the Official Opposition is currently meeting and it is expected will name a new interim leader shortly that in turn will lead to the announcement of a shadow cabinet of official critics. The third party NDP is also meeting this week and is also expected to announce its own shadow critic line up shortly. Hopefully by the time you read this week's MP report the Liberal Government will announce the date when Parliament will be recalled for an expected throne

speech. My expectation is that this will occur in early December however this date has yet to be confirmed.

I would also like to thank the many citizens who have shared comments and questions with me over the past week. This input is very valuable and I invite all citizens to take a moment to share your concerns. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

November 12th

Since my report from last week all major parties have now had their first full caucus meetings in Ottawa. These first caucus meetings are important for a variety of reasons but one that will be material to this report is the provisions related to The Reform Act. For those of you unfamiliar with the Reform Act, it was a private member's bill sponsored by MP Michael Chong. It proposed a number of measures to increase the power of individual Members of Parliament within their party caucus and by extension to reduce the power of the party leader. The Reform Act was widely supported by media, many pundits and locally by a large number of citizens who took the time to share their support with me.

Ultimately the Reform Act, after a number of amendments, was passed by both the House of Commons and the Senate and is now law. As the 42nd Parliament is the first to convene since the Reform Act was passed, one of the legal requirements at the first caucus meeting of a party is to vote on what, if any, measures of the Reform Act would be adopted by the MPs of each party caucus. The 99 member Conservative Opposition caucus voted to adopt two of the four measures from the Reform Act and modified a third condition. This contrasts with the Liberal Government caucus who voted to reject any measure of the Reform Act with all 184 Liberal MPs unanimously agreeing to reject the Reform Act and maintain the status quo. The third party NDP has also announced they will not be supporting any measures of the Reform Act. It seems that the Conservative caucus is the only one to do so. Considering that the Reform Act Passed with the overwhelming support of Liberal, Conservative and NDP MPs in the last Parliament it is disappointing to see only the Conservative caucus honour that vote in this 42nd Parliament.

On that same theme I would like to take a moment to thank the many veterans and citizens who gathered at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month to remember the great sacrifices of those courageous Canadians who served so bravely. We should never forget these valiant Canadians were not drafted to serve. Our fallen and veterans made a choice to stand against tyranny and oppression and fought for the values that we must ensure we never take for granted today. For the duration of the next few weeks in Ottawa new and re-elected Members will be sworn into the 42nd Parliament with my own swearing in occurring on November 17th. The House of Commons will reconvene December 3rd with our first order of business being the election of our next Speaker, which is widely expected to be a member from the governing Liberal Party. On Friday December 4th, our Governor General will present the Speech from the Throne, announcing the priorities of the new Government in the upcoming sitting and likely the parliamentary calendar will be set at that point for the remainder of the current session.

Before I close this week I would like to thank the many citizens who have taken the time to share

comments, questions and concerns with me over the past week. Your input is greatly valued. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

November 18th

Since I was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2011, each week I have submitted an MP report in an effort to better communicate with citizens. When the House of Commons is sitting it can often be a challenge to try and summarize a week of events in roughly 550 words. This week, because of world events that have occurred since the terror attacks in Paris that claimed 129 lives, words alone cannot put this horrific event into context. However we also must not shy away from discussing such a critically important topic that is of great importance to all citizens who live in a free and democratic society.

Over the past number of days I have heard an unprecedented amount of concern regarding the new Liberal Government's plans to accelerate the process to bring 25,000 refugees to Canada before the end of the year. In large part the concern is overwhelming related to security. Citizens are rightfully concerned that those who would seek to do us harm might attempt to compromise the generosity of our refugee system in order to gain entry to Canada. These concerns are compounded by unconfirmed reports that possibly one of the terrorists involved in the Paris attacks could have gained entry posing as refugees. In addition a growing number of security experts have cautioned that such a large number of refugees cannot be effectively or properly screened in such a small window of time. As a result of these concerns many elected officials, most notably Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, have asked the Trudeau Liberal Government to slow down the process and ensure that it is done properly.

The concerns put forward by Premier Wall are very similar to what I am hearing from an overwhelming majority of citizens here in Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola and are concerns that as the Official Opposition we will be taking to the Liberal Government in Ottawa. To date the Liberal Government has indicated the accelerated timeline that was set by the Liberals during the election will be maintained. Unfortunately the Liberal Government has not released a formal plan nor effectively communicated how this accelerated refugee process can be accomplished in a manner that does not compromise public safety, more so as the new Public Safety Minister has been quoted as admitting that no vetting process is foolproof. To what extent the accelerated screening process is foolproof remains undetermined at this point thus further creating legitimate concerns for citizens.

While the need for screening and security is clearly understandable, we must not overlook that the vast majority of refugees are only looking for a safe and welcoming country where they will not be in harm's way. Many of these families undertook significant risks and left everything behind in the hopes that a better future could be possible for them and their families. Here in Canada, we are that future. We can choose to get involved, to be welcoming and to support those individuals, groups and organizations that often act as sponsors to help refugees settle in our towns and cities. While the need for security and adequate screening remains a critical concern it must not be overlooked that successful immigration and integration depends upon a welcoming and inclusive society that respects and supports our diversity. All of this has come to be part of what it means to be a Canadian. I will continue to provide updates on this matter as they become available and encourage all citizens to share your comments and concerns with me at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or 1-800-665-8711.

November 25th

In last week's MP report I committed to providing further updates as they become available with respect to the Liberal Government's plan to relocate 25,000 refugees to Canada prior to the end of 2015. This week more information has been provided on this topic that continues to be raised by citizens in Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola daily.

The most significant announcement from the Liberal Government this week is that the timeline to relocate 25,000 refugees prior to the end of 2015 will not be met. Instead the revised deadline has been extended to fall into March of 2016. Other changes include privately sponsored refugees now being included within the total number of 25,000 refugees relocated to Canada. It has also been announced that refugees who are women, children, families and men that may be members of LGBT communities will be prioritized for refugee status.

How does this process work? Canada will accept referrals from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) who has identified refugees from Jordan and Lebanon that meet the criteria. Refugees who are accepting relocation to Canada will complete an iris scan to confirm their identity. Once identity has been confirmed, the Government has indicated that the process will include a medical examination, screening for communicable diseases and also security screening including biometric scans that includes finger printing and digital photo identification which will be cross referenced with various immigration, law enforcement and security databases. Refugees who successfully pass through this screening process will then be issued permanent resident visas and flown free of charge (in the past refugees were loaned airfare fees) via private charter aircraft to either Montreal or Toronto airports.

After landing in Canada refugees will be resettled in 36 different cities across Canada with 13 being located in Quebec and the remaining 23 outside of Quebec including several here in British Columbia. At this point the full list of cities and breakdown of numbers for each of these cities has not been publicly released however is expected in the near future. Some will view these recent changes as broken election promises from the Liberal Government. From my perspective the original timeline announced by the Liberals was an arbitrary political one and I will credit the Government for recognizing that taking the time to process and resettle refugees properly are far more important considerations than meeting its own politically self-imposed timelines. While all Canadians may have different views on this topic I believe we are united in the desire to see new citizens welcomed in a manner that offers the best possible chance for success for everyone as we grow our Canadian family.

Also occurring this past week was an announcement by the Leader of the official opposition, Hon. Rona Ambrose appointing the opposition critic positions. It is an honour for me to be named as the critic for Inter-Provincial trade which also includes labour mobility. As Canada enters into an unprecedented new era of international trade deals it remains critically important that our local producers have full and free access to our Canadian domestic market across Provincial borders. As always I welcome your comments, questions and concerns. I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

December 2015

December 2nd

This will be the first full week that all Members of Parliament will be back in Ottawa and already a heavy partisan overtone is descending upon Parliament Hill. The issue buzzing around Ottawa at the moment is news reported from the CBC that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is billing taxpayers for the cost of two nannies. As CBC also reported this is in stark contrast to the comments made by Mr. Trudeau prior to the election that wealthy Canadian families did not need universal daycare subsidies. A point that also resonates with many in the NDP as a national daycare program was part of the NDP platform as opposed to a daycare plan solely that benefits the Prime Minister who currently earns \$334,000 per year. From my own perspective as a Member of Parliament who is also a father to a family of four I do not believe taxpayers should provide special childcare subsidies to elected officials.

Other news released this week less political in nature is from Statistics Canada confirming that Canada's GDP grew .6% in the third quarter ending in September. Expressed as an annualized rate this translates to real GDP expansion of 2.3% in the third quarter – a rate that also exceeded real GDP growth in the United States during the same time frame. As many will recall the Liberals were promising multiple deficit budgets on largely on account of inaccurate claims that Canada was in a recession. Will positive GDP growth result in revised Liberal Government deficit spending? Unlikely. Late last week the Trudeau Liberal Government announced a spending commitment of \$2.65 Billion over the next 5 years to help other developing countries fight climate change. The list of other countries and how this money will be spent was not revealed however as this announcement was not part of the recent Liberal campaign promises and is not in the current budget it is widely expected that deficit spending will increase.

On the subject of deficit spending this week the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report indicating that the new Liberal Government is not expected to balance the budget in the 2019-2020 fiscal period as is currently promised. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer the projected deficit in 2019-2020 will be roughly \$4.6 Billion and not a surplus of \$1.7 Billion as forecast by the Liberal Government. Much of these projections are based on economic growth assumptions and as is always the case of Government there must also be consideration for Government spending increases or decreases. It will be critically important in this next Parliament that we work proactively and constructively on policies that will help encourage economic growth.

As mentioned previously with all Members of Parliament back in Ottawa this will be a very busy few weeks. On Wednesday all caucuses will be meeting as is common practice when the House of Commons is in session and on Thursday our new Speaker will be voted in with a new preferential secret ballot process that will be more timely than the run off process that has been used traditionally. On Friday Canadians will hear the new Liberal Government's throne speech that will outline the commitments and priorities of the new Liberal Government that can be expected in this session of Parliament. On Monday, December 7th, the House will officially resume in what is expected to be a one week session before the Christmas break begins. In next week's report I will cover the throne speech and whatever bills are put before the House. As always I welcome your

comments, questions and concerns. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

December 9th

Since my report from last week, the new Liberal Government has had its throne speech presented and has revealed its priorities for the upcoming legislative session of Parliament. As you may have heard this throne speech was a short one and focussed on five general topics. The first topic related to proposed taxation changes and spending priorities, a subject I will refer to further later in my report as it is also the subject of new legislation.

The second topic of the throne speech relates to government openness including a promise to end our first-past-the-post voting system and also reduced partisanship in the Senate.

The third topic of the throne speech relates to promises such as putting a price on carbon and introducing changes to the environmental assessment process.

The fourth subject area of the throne speech promised new efforts to focus on the relations between government and First Nations, to continue efforts with the resettling of 25,000 Syrian refugees and increased support for the CBC and Radio Canada.

The final subject area of the throne speech was varied and included promises to downsize our military, legalize marijuana, as well as a commitment to continue to pursue trade opportunities and to provide greater support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The above is a brief summary of some of the key points within the throne speech that was also heavily criticized for being silent on agriculture, efforts to increase jobs and support the economy and also a real concern for British Columbia and our region – no mention of the expired Softwood Lumber agreement. This is a point I have been active on, raising in the House several times already, given the importance of forestry to communities such as Princeton, Merritt and West Kelowna who are home to lumber mills that are significant employers. Having no new arrangement to replace the Softwood Lumber Agreement creates uncertainty, chasing away much desired investment from our economy. Fortunately the BC MPs I have discussed this with on both sides of the House have positively responded and are calling the Government to make this a priority.

Also occurring in the House of Commons this week is the debate on a government bill to change the Income Tax Act, a subject that is generating a fair bit of discussion in Ottawa at the moment. During the election, many will recall that the Liberals promised a revenue neutral middle class tax cut as part of a fully costed Liberal platform. Now it has been revealed that in fact the Liberal math was in error and this tax cut actually creates another deficit of \$1-2 Billion annually, possibly more.

The NDP has also raised opposition on the fairness of the Liberal tax cut. For those low income families most in need earning up to \$44,700 per year there is, as the NDP points out, no tax cut at all from these proposed Liberal tax changes. In fact, the proposed Liberal tax cut will only apply to income earners in the next tax bracket who earn between \$45,000 up to \$ 90,000 per year. However the way Canadian taxes are structured, the lower income tax rate on this amount of money earned also applies to those who earn between \$90,000 up to \$199,000 as the Liberals plan to increase taxes on those who earn over \$200,000 per year. In other words a family earning \$44,000 per year will receive no income tax cut whereas a family earning \$199,000 per year will see a tax cut. As the

Liberals have a majority it is expected these tax changes will be passed in time for the next taxation year.

One other change is that the Liberal government will also decrease the maximum contribution limit for a TFSA account after it was just increased to \$10,000 annually in the 2015 budget. It is expected that the Liberals will reduce the TFSA deposit maximum back to \$5,500 so 2015 may be the only year it is possible to contribute the current limit of \$10,000. Also expected this week is an announcement from the Prime Minister on when the first chartered or possibly military aircraft will arrive to Canada with Syrian refugees. If you have comments, questions or concerns I can be reached at dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

December 16th

This week began with several media headlines from Ottawa suggesting that the Liberal Government was not ruling out a tax increase to the GST to help pay for the rising Liberal deficit spending. It was not long after that I heard from many upset citizens on this subject as a GST increase was not in the Liberal platform. Fortunately our new Finance Minister, the Hon. Bill Morneau has stated through social media that these headlines were misleading and that the Liberal Government is not considering changes to the GST. It may seem unusual for an Opposition MP to help clarify that the new Liberal Government is not pondering a GST increase, however I feel that it is important to do so.

One of the things I discovered as a member of the Government caucus in the last Parliament was that all too often Government policy was reported in an erroneous and sometimes misleading way. In my view miscommunication of government policy not only does a disservice to elected officials, but more importantly the citizens they represent. As an Opposition critic it is my duty to hold Government to account however as a Member of Parliament I believe it also important to communicate Government policy and positions accurately, regardless of the Opposition position. The need to work constructively to try and raise the bar in our electoral governance and its institutions is an important one. While Government is often blamed for cynicism of voters, there is also room for Opposition to take action and that includes addressing misinformation when it occurs. As always I welcome your views on this subject.

Although the House of Commons is currently adjourned until Monday, January 25, 2016, there is still a large amount of events occurring. Throughout Canada including here in our region of British Columbia, the first Syrian Refugee families are now arriving. While the Government has been keen to take credit for much of this work it is also extremely important to recognize that many of the current refugees arriving are privately sponsored. We all at one point or another have faced a new situation whether it was starting at a new school or job and how stressful it can be, particularly if you find the environment less than welcoming. One can only imagine then the stress of leaving one's home to another country entirely. I would like to personally thank the many individuals and organizations who are working tirelessly together as private sponsors to ensure that our newly arriving Canadian citizens are successfully welcomed and become proud members of our Canadian family.

Also occurring in Ottawa this week is the release of the full report from the Truth and Reconciliation Report that summarizes one of the darkest times in our history as the result of aboriginal children being forced to attend residential schools. While we cannot change our past we can learn from this

chapter in history and use this experience to build on a better future. The Government has indicated that they will accept all of the recommendations from this report and work towards implementation. I will report further on this subject when more information becomes available. Finally this week is the subject of town halls. A number of citizens have suggested they would like to see community town halls where citizens can meet directly with their Member of Parliament to discuss matters of importance and also to pass on comments and concerns. One area I have heard a number of complaints from is citizens who worked during this past election and still have not been paid or encountered other difficulties. While this is just one example there are others that have encouraged me to investigate the idea of hosting a number of community forums throughout our region. My question to citizens is a community forum something you would be willing to attend and are there specific concerns you would like to see addressed or more of an open format? All responses will be treated in confidence. I can be reached via email at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

December 22nd

I have always been a strong believer in accountability and transparency. It is for this reason that I have published an annual accountability report that discloses my total public spending, sponsored travel and other details to help ensure citizens can have this information easily available to hold me to account as it is not always easily located online. In fact I believe strongly that wages, benefits and spending of all democratically elected officials should be publicly disclosed and easily accessible. It is for these reasons that in the last Parliament I also voted in favor of the First Nations Financial Transparency Act so that band members could also access similar information for their elected Chief and council.

I raise the First Nations Financial Transparency Act as the Liberal Government has announced that provisions for not complying with the financial transparency act will no longer be enforced, thus in effect neutering the act for those Bands who do not provide fiscal transparency to band members. In my view increased fiscal transparency in first nation's communities is important and I will provide a few examples on why that it is. In BC some members of the Shuswap First Nation were shocked to discover wages in excess of hundreds of thousands was being paid without the full knowledge of the community. This information was only revealed because of the financial transparency act and ultimately was information that was useful to band members in band elections. It was also the financial transparency act that revealed a First Nations Chief from the Kwikwetlem First Nation received over \$914,000 in wages for 2013/2014 fiscal period. Once again this information was not widely known to the majority of the membership in that community prior to the financial transparency act.

Most important is that the two examples I provided were generally exceptions as the vast majority of Chiefs and council earn wages and benefits that are entirely reasonable for what is an increasingly complex and challenging position. The fact that many First Nations communities, estimated to be as high as ninety percent, complied with the legislation is a positive indicator for transparency and accountability so that all band members can be better informed. It is for these reasons that I am disappointed that the Liberal Government has decided to gut this particular legislation, more so as "open government" has been a stated goal of our new Liberal Prime Minister. To date these changes to First Nation's fiscal transparency have been done through administrative changes and not a vote in

the House of Commons. In the event there is a vote I will vote for fiscal accountability that includes ensuring wages and benefits paid to public office holders is publicly available to all citizens including first nations in an open and transparent manner. I welcome your thoughts on this subject.

Before I close I would like to take a moment to wish all citizens a very merry Christmas and happy holidays. It is an honour to be one of the elected representatives for this region and I would like to thank the many citizens who take the time to share questions, concerns and ideas with me on a weekly basis. Your time and feedback is always appreciated. I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

December 30th

From a Canadian political perspective 2015 has been a big year as Canada now has a new 42nd Parliament with a change in Government, a change in the Official Opposition and a change in the third party. Aside from these obvious changes come new Ministers, a new Speaker in both the House of Commons and the Senate along with roughly 200 newly elected MPs. From a Provincial perspective a number of elections have also resulted in a change in Government and Opposition most notably in Alberta where for the first time an NDP Government is now in power.

Political change is a sign of a healthy and vibrant democracy as citizens have the freedom to vote for the elected representatives and Government they feel will do the best job in providing good governance. I was reminded of the significant changes in Federal and Provincial Governments in late December as all Provincial and Territorial Finance Ministers gathered in Ottawa to meet with our new Federal Finance Minister, the Hon. Bill Morneau. Many of the Finance Ministers in attendance at this meeting were relatively new, a point that was well profiled in many media stories.

Unfortunately there was another point that in my view was overlooked by many: of the 14 Finance Ministers at this meeting (Including the Federal Finance Minister & Territorial Ministers) currently only two Ministers are presiding over a balanced budget- British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Ironically both of these Provinces have not recently had a change in Government. I raise this point largely because of the growing number of Governments that are increasing debt and deficits while media attention seems often focused on other subjects. As an example of my concern Ontario is now the largest sub-debtor in the World with a debt of \$294 Billion that is more than double that of California, which has a much larger population. Already our newly elected Liberal Government who during the election promised to run "modest deficits" has revised this promise to indicate it was only a goal and not an actual promise in the face of rising deficit spending.

My point in this week's report is not to revisit the election or single out specific governments but rather to remind citizens that this is our debt that continues to grow and payments on the interest of that debt leaves less capacity for spending on other much needed Government services. As it is often pointed out while we have three levels of Government in Canada, there is only one taxpayer. Democracy allows us to vote in Governments at all levels and one question we should all ponder as we head into 2016 is what fiscal priorities are most important to you. Do not be afraid to reach out to your local councillor, Mayor, area director, MLA or MP to share your views. I am available at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or toll free at 1-800-665-8711.

Before I close I do have one small bit of positive good news to share for Canadian taxpayers. The new 42nd Parliament will be the first where newly elected MPs will no longer qualify for the former gold plated pension plan. MP pensions, much like the Federal public sector pension plan, will move towards 50/50 cost sharing and MPs will no longer be fully eligible until age 65. The combined

savings from the changes to the MP and Public Sector pension plans is estimated to be \$2.6 Billion over the next five years alone. On that note I would like to wish all citizens a happy and prosperous New Year.