

JOHN SLATER: 30 YEARS AND COUNTING

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For more than 30 years, John Slater has been in South Okanagan politics in one way or another. Asked what it is that's kept him here since he first moved here in 1980, he had one simple answer.

"The people are wonderful. Everybody's working together and they're all working for the community," said Slater. "That's what I love about this town. Whether you're at the golf course or the restaurants or the grocery stores, people come up to you and tell you 'why don't we do this' and 'why don't we do that.' Some of your best ideas come out of coffee shops, I can tell you that."

Before becoming a member of town council in 1990, Slater was an active member of the community, sitting on a number of local boards and committees – Osoyoos and District Recreation Committee, Osoyoos Child and Youth Committee and the Osoyoos Chamber of Commerce. He also spent a great deal of time coaching various youth sports teams.

After spending 12 years on town council, Slater successfully threw his hat in the ring for mayor in 2002. He held onto the position for two consecutive terms until 2009, when, on advice from then B.C. premier Gordon Campbell, he decided to make the jump from municipal to provincial politics.

"I'd been in local politics for 18 years, plus sat on a few boards, and I was convinced [to run] by the peers that I work with in Victoria," said Slater. "The cabinet ministers and premier at the time, they came to me and said, 'This is a built-for-John riding and we think you should run for the Liberal party.'"

In 2009 Slater was elected MLA for the Boundary-Similkameen riding, narrowly beating out the NDP candidate, Lakhvinder Jhaj, by less than 1,000 votes. The riding stretches around Grand Forks and Rock Creek, includes both Oliver and Osoyoos, and goes all the way to the Similkameen valley towns of Keremeos and Princeton.

Now, some two and a half years after taking office, Slater said he spends half his life living in Victoria and the

other half in the South Okanagan.

A typical week goes like this: he flies out to Victoria Friday night and spends the weekend researching and preparing for the upcoming week. Monday and Tuesday are spent in the legislature, and on Wednesday, he spends the morning meeting with various groups looking for government funding and support. The rest of the day is spent back in the legislature. Thursday is a repeat of Wednesday, but with less morning meetings, and then it's back home to Osoyoos Thursday night around midnight. Friday is spent at his local office, or on the road visiting different communities in the riding for meetings and discussions.

On weekends when he isn't in Victoria, a lot of his time is spent making appearances in different towns for various events, like Christmas light-ups and Remembrance Day ceremonies.

"It's way different than when you're mayor. When you're mayor you're working on roads and sidewalks and sewer pipes and water pipes and gymnasiums and arenas, whereas when you're in the province, you got the education issues [and] health issues," said Slater.

"Every day is a little bit different; you learn a little bit more."

Slater has dedicated his time towards certain issues since becoming an MLA. Of all the problems, he said the biggest problem facing the riding is maintaining employment and populations in smaller communities.

"We want to make sure that we have something for the families to do, to be able to earn an income in our communities, and it doesn't matter whether it's Grand Forks, Midway or Greenwood, it's all about keeping families together," said Slater

Healthcare is critical to the populations in smaller communities. Slater said most people, especially seniors, have a real need to be close to readily available healthcare, and without it, they're going to go elsewhere.

To solve this problem, Slater has been working at providing communities with more first responders, like paramedics, nurses and others who live in the community and are able to provide healthcare before a trip to the hospital is necessary. Finally, he said building clinics, like the Horizon Health Centre on Main Street in Osoyoos, is also a viable option to those who need quick access to healthcare.

"That's going to be a good one because it's going to have doctors, pharmacists, dentists... I think it's a really good program and I think it'll work in Osoyoos," said Slater.

Of all the issues he's helped tackle over the years, Slater said the thing he's most proud of is preliminary work he's done on the Water Sustainability Act.

"I've always been very passionate about water issues," said Slater. "I sat on the Okanagan Basin Water Board for eight years, four years as chair."

The act has seven areas it aims to regulate when it comes to water use in British Columbia: protect stream health and aquatic environments, consider water in land-use decisions, regulate groundwater use, regulate during scarcity, improve security, water use efficiency and conservation, measure and report and finally, enable a range of government approaches.

Slater said although the slow process of the act has him frustrated at times, what the act will do for residents regarding the quantity, quality and control of local water resources will make all the work worthwhile.