

At work in Ottawa

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By Stephen Fuhr

When I was running to be the member of Parliament for Kelowna-Lake Country, I welcomed the opportunity to share ideas and points of view on what makes a good government.

Since Election Day, the willingness of constituents to continue to reach out to share opinions has been invaluable to learning the job. To date, more than 1,000 constituents and organizations have made contact on everything from the resettlement of Syrian refugees, physician-assisted dying, and the combat mission to fight ISIS, to the need for more funding for multiple sclerosis, and a health-care system that addresses the needs of an aging population.

How the government spends taxpayers' dollars is also important to constituents.

In the lead up to the our government's first federal budget, which will be tabled on March 22, many of you participated in the pre-budget consultation process and provided me with suggestions which found their way into our Kelowna-Lake Country budget priorities submission to Finance Minister Bill Morneau.

Input also comes from constituents who visit Ottawa on behalf of local organizations.

Just recently, Prof. Deborah Buszard and her team from the University of British Columbia Okanagan met with me in Ottawa and shared an exciting proposal that will solidify Kelowna-Lake Country's reputation as one of the fastest growing innovation hubs in Canada.

Glen Lucas and Fred Steele of the British Columbia Fruit Growers Association also came to Ottawa, where I was able to arrange a meeting with the parliamentary secretary to the minister of agriculture so the BCGFA could advocate for the next suite of agricultural programs that will support our fruit growers.

I was also pleased to welcome Chief Byron Louis from the Okanagan Indian Band and to make representation on the band's behalf to see what can be done to expedite the cleanup of thousands of acres of valuable land littered with explosives left behind from former military training exercises.

Though there is much to do in the House of Commons, including chairing the Standing Committee on Defence, I spend a large block of time connecting with my cabinet colleagues for help on local files.

We've had some early successes, thanks to our government's willingness to help our riding. We managed to stay the deportation of Carlos Vargas, father of three, on compassionate and humanitarian grounds, and to get assurance from the minister of veterans' affairs to reopen the local Veterans Office.

Back in the riding, ongoing meetings discussing the local economy with our local chambers of commerce, our mayors and MLAs have been and remain vital to addressing local infrastructure requirements, important discussions on the amalgamation of our water districts, and other priorities like the Okanagan rail corridor.

And two government funding announcements to help the community were certainly welcome: one in conjunction with the Central Okanagan Foundation and the Community Advisory Board in support of the community's first Housing First initiative; the second in support of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, to help us better understand the water needs in a region known for its water challenges.

I want to thank all those who have taken the time to share their concerns and views. For those who need help with the federal government, my staff and I are here to help in any way we can. You can reach us by phone at 250-470-5075, by email at Stephen.Fuhr.C1@parl.gc.ca, and walk-ins are welcome at my constituency office at 102-1420 St. Paul St.

Though the learning curve these past few months has been steep, it is a great privilege to have the opportunity to serve you as your member of Parliament.

Stephen Fuhr is MP for Kelowna-Lake Country.