

The year in review, a Federal Liberal prospective

by
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The year 2010 was a busy one for federal Liberals in Leeds-Grenville and across Canada.

On Parliament Hill, the year started off with controversy: Stephen Harper Prorogued Parliament, shutting the government down for nearly 3 months and delaying 36 bills - while he “recalibrated”. According to media reports, the cost to taxpayers was nearly \$50 million.

While Parliament was shuttered, Liberals kept on working, holding over 50 public hearings. I attended several sessions. We heard from veterans who described weaknesses in the help that they receive after being injured in the line of duty. And – most importantly –the business community explained to us the actions needed to enable them to create jobs.

Here in Leeds-Grenville we held three Public Policy Forums – in Brockville, Gananoque and Kemptville - and reported the key findings to Steven Harper, Michael Ignatieff and the local media.

The Liberal party and Mr. Ignatieff held a major policy conference on how to strengthen Canada’s place in the world, improve our health care system and set the right conditions for job creation. It was not a remote conference: Internet technology allowed residents in Leeds-

Grenville to gather and watch it live – and to submit their questions and get answers in real-time.

Mr. Ignatieff held over 100 events during his summer “Liberal Express” tour – including an open-air event in Brockville. This was in sharp contrast to Stephen Harper’s closed-door, invitation-only, style of politics. I spent two days “on the bus” with the tour, and attended events in eight communities in Eastern Ontario.

All year long Federal Liberals were on the move in Leeds-Grenville – knocking on doors, attending events and participating in parades.

With a team of volunteers, I canvassed in every part of the riding – cities, towns and country roads. I learned what was on people’s minds through respectful conversations rather than the angry tones that tend to dominate so many of our national debates.

By far the biggest issue I hear about is the need for more jobs; people care deeply about having better opportunities in Leeds-Grenville – especially for our young people. I speak with individuals who have been laid off – some several times. I talk with parents with grown children who are unable to get jobs that match their education – or any jobs at all.

But the news is not all bad. I meet people living in all parts of Leeds-Grenville who are working for international companies from their homes by using the internet. I also hear from people developing new technologies that, if successful, will be the basis for new jobs in our area, and meet with companies hoping to expand.

All of these people and companies are choosing to live, work and create new products and new jobs in Leeds-Grenville – a testament to our wonderful communities. This bodes well for our ability to attract new jobs in the future.

The Liberal commitment to increased access to higher education and training will enable more Canadians to create and fill these new jobs – and keep the work here at home. Our commitment to investing in renewable energies will fight climate change and reduce air pollution. It will also bring jobs to all parts of Canada – not just regions with oil and gas under their feet.

Health care is a topic that I hear a lot about. There are still issues with waiting times, and some feel that staff that serve patients are being cut while the number of administrative staff is increasing. However, the good news is that most are very satisfied with the care they receive.

Many people tell me that they are struggling to look after family members who are gravely ill. I hope that the Liberals have the opportunity to implement our Family Care Plan, to provide financial assistance to such families to help them to keep their families together. Not only is this a better solution for families, it will reduce health care costs.

Food is another issue I hear about. Many want better labels so that we know where our food comes from, and are worried that our system of inspection has not kept up with the flood of imported food from countries that lack Canada's history of food safety. All want the opportunity to buy more from our local producers.

Financially, people are struggling to save for retirement. Three-quarters of Canadians working in the private sector do not have company pension plans. Liberals are asking the Harper government to allow working Canadians to save more through an expanded Canada Pension Plan.

Yes, some of the Liberal commitments will cost money. But we balanced the budget before and we have a plan to do so again - a plan to stop corporate tax cuts and build fewer mega prisons - while the crime rate is falling.

Many people express frustration over the high level of taxes that they pay. They know that taxes are necessary to pay for our public services, but are not sure that they are getting value for their money. They shake their heads about the government's billion dollar three-day international meeting in Toronto – complete with the Fake Lake. Many do not understand the changes to the census that will provide governments will less reliable data – while costing more.

On the issue of our future role in Afghanistan, I continue to hear opinions on all sides. One young man who had worked in Afghanistan reported that the Afghans pleaded with Canadians to stay because our troops excel at working with local communities. Others see the mission as futile and want us out. I support the future training mission, as a lower cost and lower risk way to pass on our expertise to those Afghans who are risking their lives to build a better country.

On a lighter note, I walked and shook hands along the Christmas parade routes in six communities, accompanied by a cute little float and 20 volunteers handing out thousands of candy canes. We all had fun, and brought smiles to the kids – and the adults liked the candy too!

As your Federal Liberal Candidate, I want to wish each and everyone a healthy, prosperous 2011.

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