

Bossio wishes best for 2017

What a year 2016 was!

As a new member of parliament, it has been an absolutely incredible experience, and I am thankful every day for the opportunity that has been afforded to me.

Although I grew up in Madoc, and have raised my own family in Lonsdale, there is nothing like being a member of parliament to help you get in touch with your community at a level you might never have thought possible. I spent 2016 regularly crisscrossing our riding, meeting with constituents, municipalities, businesses, and many other organizations, with hundreds of meetings already under my belt. With 19 municipalities, two counties, and the Mohawk Territory comprising our riding, it doesn't take long to add up! It's always a pleasure for my staff and I to head to North Hastings. The land is beautiful, and the welcome is always very friendly. We have held monthly office hours in Bancroft, and held several town halls and roundtables there, including on pre-budget consultations, climate change, and electoral reform. For me, these have been a vital connection to the people I serve, and an important indication that our government takes its commitment to open, transparent, and consultative government very seriously. These conversations have given me a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by our small communities, which I constantly communicate to my colleagues back in Ottawa. One of my key roles and challenges has been to educate MPs from urban ridings who have very different representation realities to face in their constituencies, which are usually only one small part of a larger city. For them, they have several MPs who are advocating for a single city. For my rural colleagues and I, we each have 1 MP advocating for several municipalities!

I was humbled last year to be named chair of National Rural Caucus by my Liberal colleagues. And humbled, too, to see for myself just how much is actually possible when a team comes together with passion, a determination to help, and a hard work ethic. This was the case with the \$500 million dollars rural caucus was able to secure in the budget this year to expand broadband Internet in rural and remote areas. Over 300,000 households across Canada will benefit from this broadband infrastructure, which we know is critical for long-term economic growth and sustainable prosperity. It will bring better access to online education and e-health, improved communications and media, and increased access to online goods and services. It will also enable rural Canadians to unleash their entrepreneurial spirit, push employment and business opportunities up, and grow the middle class.

We were also able to score big for small rural communities by successfully advocating to the Ministers of Finance and Infrastructure to have \$2 billion set aside purely for the infrastructure needs of small rural communities. This will be in addition to the historic infrastructure investments of more than \$180 billion over 12 years for the whole country, which small rural communities will also have access to. I heard time and again from the over 80 meetings that I've had with municipal officials in our riding about how challenging it is for our small communities to compete with large communities for funding, and how important it is to upgrade their roads, bridges, water, and sewer systems. I will continue to advocate to level the playing field.

On the "big picture" side of things, our new tax-free Canada Child Benefit (CCB) will lift almost 300,000 kids nation-wide out of poverty, including countless local children. Our region has one of the highest levels of child poverty in Canada at twice the provincial average, according to our local Poverty Roundtable. This is a signature piece of legislation to combat local poverty and I could not be more proud. Families who benefit from the CCB will see an average of \$2,300 more per year, tax free. That's much-needed help for families, whether it's used for putting kids into an arts or sports program, new supplies for school, or food on the table.

Our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, has said that "young voices must be part of our decision making process" and that's why I also take particular pride in the creation of the Constituency Youth Council for our riding. We have excellent representation on this council from North Hastings, and I've been very fortunate to have this council's input already on a number of topics, including the 2017 pre-budgetary consultations.

We promised Canadians real change and with your support, your input, your ideas and passion, we will continue to deliver real change here close to home, in neighbourhoods, in communities, and across our nation!

Submitted by Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio