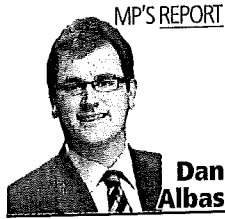


Retiring Barisoff will be missed

This week, residents of the Okanagan learned that long-term local MLA Bill Barisoff will be retiring from public office at the conclusion of his term in April 2013.

As a former Penticton city councillor, I can speak firsthand for Barisoff's considerable list of accomplishment during his near two decades of public service representing our region in Victoria.

While the list of successful projects that Barisoff championed in the South Okanagan is indeed impressive and likely to be unequalled, as the MP for this area there is an-



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other and I submit more important legacy that he will leave behind.

If there is any one thing I have learned from Barisoff, it is that you do not need to aggressively criticize and condemn your opposition, nor do you need to engage in partisan personal attacks against your opponents in order to represent your constituents.

When I first arrived in Ottawa last year and began my work on Bill C-311, I followed many of the same principles he demonstrated to me.

By leaving partisan politics and personal attacks out of the discussions, I was able to work with and gain the support from members of all sides of the House of Commons and as a result accomplished a small but important change to the benefit of our region.

My thanks to Mr. Barisoff for his many years of service to the Okanagan and I wish him well in his future time with friends and family upon retirement.

Last week, Canada had some good news on the international front.

While as a country we may win more bronze than gold at the Olympics, there is one area where Canada has again set the gold standard and that is in retaining our stable triple-A credit rating.

Why is this critically important and in Canada's national interests? Currently we are paying \$30.9 billion a year to service our national debt.

To put that amount of money in context, \$21.3 billion is spent on defence and the current amount of federal health transfers to the provinces is \$26 billion.

So, more money is spent on debt servicing from a federal perspective than is currently transferred back to provinces to support health care.

While I still have concerns when factoring in provincial and Canadian household debt, we still are fortunate here in Canada that our federal debt load is extremely modest compared to an increasing amount of other countries around the world.

However it is also important to illustrate the challenges that debt creates because ultimately it means that money that could be better spent pro-

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viding services or further lowering taxes is not available.

It is also important from a fiscal standpoint to maintain the highest possible credit rating as credit downgrades result in increased interest charges and that means more tax dollars are diverted from services to debt repayment.

Credit rating reviews are somewhat like report cards on how good a job as government we are doing in fiscally managing the finances of the country.

As I have mentioned in my previous columns, for governments at all levels making difficult decisions that can be politically unpopular is increasingly becoming a rare event globally.

In fact, there are now only 16 out of 133 different countries that still maintain a triple AAA

credit rating, and even of those 16, many have a negative outlook compared to Canada's positive. I also believe there is another side to these discussions that must not be overlooked.

As government, we can certainly point to Canada's strong credit rating as an endorsement for our economic action plan and recent budget.

However our government would not be in a majority position to undertake these directions were it not for the democratic results of the previous election.

It is worth noting that in other countries, through democracy, many governments who attempt to make difficult but important decisions are being voted out of power in favor of government's that promise to continue spending and the status quo.

I submit part of what makes us great as a nation

is that Canadians understand the need to make difficult decisions that are in the long term best interests to keep Canada

strong.
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