

Interview with MP Arif Virani (Parkdale-High Park)

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NP-UN: What were the biggest achievements and biggest challenges for Canada in 2018?

Arif Virani: Some of the biggest achievements of our federal government in 2018 included securing a modernized free trade deal with the US and Mexico through the USMCA; co-developing new legislation with Indigenous leaders and communities to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child-welfare system; introducing Canada's first-ever Poverty Reduction Strategy; increasing the Canada Child Benefit to keep up with the rising cost of living, two years ahead of schedule; introducing the Accessible Canada Act, the most robust federal legislation for persons with disabilities in over 30 years; and making unprecedented investments in protecting and preserving our environment, including a \$1.5 billion Oceans Protection Plan. I could go on, this year we saw numerous progressive developments that I know will help Canadians, protect our environment, and continue to support

our strong economy.

Of course, some of our biggest achievements were born from our biggest challenges. Negotiating the USMCA was no easy task and was a long, rigorous process, but one that Minister Chrystia Freeland and her team navigated successfully.

We have also been tasked with finding creative ways to deal with provinces and Premiers, such as the provincial government here in Ontario, who have challenged putting a price on carbon pollution and abandoned effective strategies to address climate change, the most pressing issue of our time. Our response has been to redesign green programs, such as the Low Carbon Economy Fund, to deliver benefits and incentives directly to Canadians, municipalities, schools, hospitals, and institutions, as opposed to delivering these benefits through the province.

NP-UN: What have you been concentrating on in terms of your riding since you were elected?

Arif Virani: My primary focus since being elected as the Member of Parliament for Parkdale-High Park in 2015 has always been to represent the people and

communities here in my riding. As a social justice and human rights advocate, I have strived to bring light to a number of key issues here in our riding and across the country, including affordable housing, harm reduction and the opioid crisis, combatting extremism, and protecting our environment and combatting climate change, to name a few.

I have also focused on representing the views and engaging on key issues within distinct communities here in the riding, including advocating for continued support for the Ukrainian community here in Canada and back in Ukraine. This has included not only speaking out alongside my government as a staunch ally for Ukraine, but also working to move forward the Magnitsky Act in parliament; visiting Kyiv, Ukraine this summer to engage directly with our allies; and continuing to condemn Russian aggression and threats to Ukraine's sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

Both in my riding and nationally, I have been a staunch defender of Canada's diversity and fighting against intolerance. Our multicultural policy traces

its lineage to the late Ukrainian Canadian Senator Paul Yuzyk, who first coined the term and conceived of the policy. That legacy of Senator Yuzyk has brought us to where we are today, to a pluralist Canada where we don't simply tolerate difference, we celebrate it.

As I mentioned, I have been a staunch advocate for affordable housing in my riding of Parkdale-High Park, which I was proud to see come to fruition with Canada's first-ever National Housing Strategy (NHS) announced in November 2017, a \$40 billion, 10-year plan that will address housing insecurity across the country – including right here in Parkdale-High Park.

I have had the honour to join the Canadian delegation at COP 24, the UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland. Before departing for the conference on December 7, I have been gathering feedback directly from the constituents of Parkdale-High Park to help inform what key issues I should prioritize



Arif Virani

Photo: thestar.com

at the Conference.

These are a few examples of the key issues and actions I have taken to represent the residents of Parkdale-High Park since taking office, and I continue to engage on a number of other key issues for my riding – both in the community and when I am in Ottawa.

NP-UN: What are your goals to achieve in the riding next year?

Arif Virani: My goal for the next year is to continue to listen to the residents of Parkdale-High Park about the issues that matter most to them, and to represent

their interests at the national level.

I will continue to stand by our Ukrainian-Canadian community, here in the riding and across Canada, and I will remain an outspoken ally to Ukraine and I will continue to condemn Russian aggression and its unjust imprisonment of Ukrainian prisoners.

I will continue to engage with the community on their key issues and concerns, and work with my counterparts in Ottawa to make positive, progressive changes that will benefit the residents of Parkdale-High Park.