



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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In service to all of North Vancouver

There's a reason why the signage on my storefront office at 3rd and Lonsdale doesn't mention the political party to which I belong. And it has to do with who pays the rent: you.

Though I ran in the last election as the Liberal candidate for North Vancouver, the moment I was elected my role changed. As the Member of Parliament for North Vancouver, my job is to serve all citizens of the riding – not just the ones who voted Liberal.

In these hyper-partisan times it's easy to forget that, in our system of government, Members of Parliament are intended to be non-partisan in service to their constituents.

That means all are equally welcome to visit my office or otherwise contact me and my constituency staff with questions and issues related to their dealings with the federal government.

Even the furniture

The two salaries of the constituency office staff are paid for by taxpayers. As is the heat, electricity, internet, etc. The furniture is even owned by taxpayers – much of it, in fact, passed down from my Conservative predecessor.

While it's my name on the sign outside, it truly is your office – and I encourage you to think of it that way.

Keith DeBelser, a successful businessperson, works in the office and is primarily responsible for addressing questions about government programs, for working on individual constituent issues such as immigration and for overall office management.

His colleague is Brittany Barnes. Brittany is the constituency assistant with primary responsibility for community outreach and for engagement with the variety of constituency organizations. Brittany's a recent grad from Capilano University where she served as student union president.

These two folks manage the office while I am in Ottawa – which, between September and June, averages about three of every four weeks. Between them, I can proudly boast you have the best constituency team this side of Halifax.

Listening post

For me, the constituency office provides a key listening post to ensure that I stay on top of the everyday concerns of people in North Vancouver. That's why, when I'm not in Ottawa, it's a priority for me to carve out time to be available at the office.

Ottawa, rumour has it, can be a bit of a bubble that suffers from “centre of

the universe syndrome”. And in my role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change there are days when my schedule is environment, environment, environment.

To be an effective MP, I need to be grounded in the reality that while the environment, climate change and the future of our planet are critically important to the people of North Vancouver, it is not the only thing on your minds.

At a recent event on the North Shore celebrating Nowruz, the Persian New Year, I was struck by the range of issues people want to talk to me about.

One woman with whom I had a long conversation was particularly concerned about the inadequacy of pensions for the large group of people nearing retirement who have been unable to save enough to support themselves. Others at the event were concerned about immigration, global affairs, jobs and the economy.

Two roles

From time to time, confusion can arise about the non-partisan role of the MP because of my second role. Effectively, I am the leader in North Vancouver of the Liberal Party of Canada.

The Liberal Party has its own volunteer-supported riding association in North Vancouver. It recruits supporters, raises funds for political activities both between and during elections and stages events.

These events are completely different from things like MP Town Halls (such as the recent pre-budget community consultation I facilitated). MP events are advertised broadly in the constituency, are free of charge and are open to everyone.

As I continue to learn on the job, I hope I'm continuing to grow. Part of that is not to take criticism of government personally.

Some chap named Winston Churchill said: “Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same purpose as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.”

Criticisms, suggestions or problems - feel free to deliver them anytime to the little storefront office at 3rd and Lonsdale – the one with my name on the sign.

Sponsored by the Electoral District Association of North Vancouver, Liberal Party of Canada

CONTACT INFO:

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE: 102 West 3rd Street, North Vancouver
EMAIL: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca | **TEL:** 604-775-6333